First Nation Perspective Interview

Barbara Hotelling & Joyce Leaf

In this interview, JOPPPAH Book Review Editor, Barbara Hotelling, spoke with First Nation midwife, Catherine "Joyce" Leaf, regarding Joyce's experience living, birthing, and working with her First Nation population. This interview was edited for clarity only.

Barbara Hotelling:
Joyce and I know each other through APPPAH's Cultural Inclusion Committee. Joyce, how long have you been a member of APPPAH and why did you join?

Joyce Leaf:
I joined APPPAH in 2016, when I went to my first conference. Two years prior to that, I was looking on their site and reading some of the information. I actually met Dr. Michel Odent from Paris, who was in Toronto for a conference and I went to see him there. He talked about the various organizations he was involved with. That's when it rang a bell, and I said, I know that [APPPAH] website. Anyway, I'm a fan of

Barbara Hotelling, MSN, has been a birth doula and childbirth educator since 1982. She later became a birth doula trainer and Lamaze educator trainer and has worked with pregnant and parenting teens. Recently Barbara studied When Survivors Give Birth and is training to teach the program. She studies birth psychology with APPPAH. Barbara is a Clinical Nurse Educator at Duke University's School of Nursing, where she has the honor of passing along information about parent education, being a birth doula, trauma effects, and trauma prevention to gifted and altruistic nursing students. Barbara's blessings are her 5 children and 8 grandchildren. **Catherine "Joyce" Leaf** is from the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory, which straddles the US and Canada borders of Northeastern New York, Southeastern Ontario, and Western Quebec. She attended Indian Day School on reserve up until grade six and completed junior high and high school in the neighboring community of Cornwall, Ontario. Joyce received her Nursing Diploma at the John Abbott College in Sainte Anne de Bellevue in Quebec in 1993, then pursued her Midwifery Education through the Six Nations Birthing Center near Hagersville, Ontario in 2008. The Birthing Center is the only one in Canada that is community-driven and taught with elder women who delivered babies in the homes on reserves throughout Indian Country. It is an Accredited College Program with the support of the Federal Provincial Government through the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Program (AHWS).

his, and I just love his view of women and birthing. He even shared his own birth story.

I've always been very good with children and babies. I've always had a passion for hanging out with kids and babysitting. I'm the youngest of 13, so growing up in my teenage years, I was always at one of my older sisters' homes, watching their children. Or I'd be at home with my mom watching, as a young girl. In my nursing program, maternity was my ward. I had a good relationship with those clients I met on rotations. That's how I started.

Barbara Hotelling:
I want to ask you some questions about your early beginnings, but I want to find out also what you did once you joined APPPAH. What did you look for? What did you find?

Joyce Leaf:
When I found APPPAH, they had some readings on their website about how babies can connect with their mothers. And they can connect when they're newborns. The mom and the baby connect when the baby first hears words and looks right at her mom or dad. And I'm like, 'Yeah, that's like in our Mohawk culture.' We already knew that, but APPPAH puts the science behind what we know. That drew me right into APPPAH, just to get a better understanding of the psychology of birthing women, the whole family, and all across the board—women, my mother, her mother, me, my children, and my grandchildren—how we're all connected.

Even in my first pregnancy, I was the happiest pregnant woman on the reserve. I just felt like I had this baby growing in me—that I wanted to give this baby the world. And I did everything. I exercised, ate right. And back in 1989, they said, 'You're eating for two,' and I literally ate for two. So I was eating a whole big submarine sandwich from The PNC Grocery. I'd go to our favorite pizza place and eat a whole pizza, just by myself. But I gained 60 pounds. I was told it was not good to eat fish. Lo and behold, my first child was eight pounds, eight ounces.

In my laboring process, Barbara, when I went to the hospital, my obstetrician was rich. He should have been retired, because he was my mother's obstetrician. In my laboring, I had a very difficult time. I gained an extra 60 pounds, but not even knowing that when I got into the laboring suite. In my pushing, my baby's head was too big. And, actually, she was flipped over; she was sunny-side up. So, that was a very hard labor. It ended up that I had a cesarean for her.

When I got to the hospital, I was 10 centimeters dilated. When the doctor checked my cervix, there was no warning. They just went in and did what they wanted to do—checked me, without warning me what they were going to do. Here's my first baby. I didn't know. And, he was rough to me. So, another obstetrician came in who was a younger doctor in the hospital at that time and he kind of took over. I ended up having a C-section.

When I came out of the OR suite, I had an IV, and a tube in my incision, and a catheter. So I had all these tubes on me. The nurse said, 'Do you want to go see your baby?' And I said, 'Of course, I want to see my baby.' When they rolled my gurney out to the window where the newborn nursery is, my baby was way in the back all by herself. They brought her up to the window and I could just see in the window. And I thought, 'Oh my God, she's so big. How could I have such a big baby?' Now, she had lot of hair, and she had big cheeks, and she was just beautiful, you know. I changed her name, three times before I left the hospital, because the name didn't fit. So, you know, the first labor in hospital was traumatizing for me.

Barbara Hotelling:
Mmm-hmm.

Joyce Leaf:
It was really bad for me because then I wanted to see and hold my baby. And the nurses said, 'No, you can't. You need to rest.' Well, I can't rest until I see my baby. The nurses walked out of my room; they just kind of disregarded what I said and went on to their routine. So, I dragged myself and I had my IV and my IV pole and my urine bag. And I'm pushing myself to the nursery room. I walked right in there and the nurse was sitting in her chair. I went over to my baby's crib and I was pulling her up. I was taking my baby to my room.

The nurse says, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I'm going to my room.' 'You can't take her,' said the nurse. I looked at her and said, 'Excuse me. This is my baby. I'm going to take my baby to my room. That's where you'll find us.' And I left. It was a battle all the time. It was them insinuating how they're going to let me know when I can hold my baby.

I said, 'I'm breastfeeding my baby, too. I have to feed her.' And I see this little water bottle. I said, 'What are you doing? Who allowed you to give my baby a bottle? I'm trying to breastfeed her. This is not going to help her.' And so they were kind of rolling their eyes and disregarding what I said.

As soon as I got in bed, I put the baby's crib right beside me. The nurse came in, and she was trying to take the baby out of my room. I grabbed

the baby. I said, 'You're not taking her. This is my baby. You can't take her.' She had to let her go. She said, 'Well, she can't stay in here with you.' I said, 'Why not? She was in that room over there, in a corner crying and you let her cry. You didn't even go over there.' So it was a battle the whole time being in there.

The next day, they put me into a ward room where there were four beds. There were three other women, all from the reservation. So the young nurses, they would come in and we were treated rudely because, well, obviously, we're all from the reservation. I could see this nurse. I could hear her being very friendly and very sweet to her other clients that weren't from the reservation. Then she came into our room and she wasn't very nice to talk to. I could feel right then, she didn't even want to be in the room, even to give us our lunch trays.

Barbara Hotelling:
Mmm-hmm.

Joyce Leaf:
Anyways, I had to go. After I fed the baby, they took the baby back into the nursery room and the night nurse came in. She says, 'Well, do you want to breastfeed?' I said, 'Yes, I do.' So, we both walked to the nursery. We got my daughter, and we came back to my room. And that woman sat with me for three hours just to help me go over the nursing, the latching on, the cradle hold, using pillows, and getting my water and stuff. She says, 'When you go home, you're going to have to keep up this, every 3 to 4 hours. Get up and feed your baby. And you have to remember to feed yourself.'

So we had that all set up as soon as I got home. Jeff, my partner, we've been together for almost 35 years now. And he's a very, very good man. He would make my little dish with pineapples, and crackers, or give me juice or water. He was really supportive of me breastfeeding and trying to do what I wanted to do, because growing up, I only saw women breastfeeding their babies. At our place of worship—the longhouse—I saw women breastfeeding. And I thought, 'My God, those babies, they don't cry. They're happy. You know, they're really healthy looking.' And I knew when I saw that, I was going to do that whenever I had babies. I was going to breastfeed.

So, Jeff would help me. He would get up at two o'clock in the morning, when you think you're the only one in the world up, right, breastfeeding. I breastfed all my children. And, you know, my daughter, when she had my first grandbaby, my first granddaughter, I sat with her and I

supported her, like I'd had support. And I swear to God, Barbara, when the baby was home for three days, I felt like I was engorged. I felt it.

Barbara Hotelling:
Grandmothers nurse.

Joyce Leaf:
I was like, this can't be happening. But, you know, that was just the most amazing thing. Every three hours, I was on my daughter, saying, 'You've got to eat. You've got to get comfortable.' And she did. She breastfed her baby for six months straight, exclusively.

Barbara Hotelling:
Wonderful. So, I'm hearing that you grew up in a culture that honored children—that listened to them, even when they were babies. You were listening to the babies, and you were talking back and forth with them. And you had a lot of the APPPAH research knowledge already in your culture. So then, when you met with a Western culture that did not know that information, did not seek that information, did not know the risk for women and infants and families, it must have been very hard for you.

Joyce Leaf:
Well, sort of. But I know every culture has their own way of connecting with their people or their own bodies or their growing babies. I know that other people do that too. And so, when I heard about APPPAH, I was like, there you go. There's the research. It's proven. Everything that my mother and my grandmother always talked about, science has proven it.

Barbara Hotelling:
When did you decide to become a midwife?

Joyce Leaf:
I wanted to go back to school after I finished nursing. Financially, we couldn't do it. So, I got a job at a brand-new nursing home that was just built in our community. It was a 30-bed, long-term care facility. As a graduated nurse, I worked as a health care aide. I had to work a couple of years to show them I could do everything. But, I had to actually fight for that job. And I needed the money. I spent three years studying nursing and all I could get is a health care aide job. That's not right. This is my community. These are my people. I need this job. You're hiring people that aren't from the reserve. And these are our people; we need to take care of our people.

I had to fight. I fought, and I got my job. I worked six years. And finally, I said, I'm going to go back to school, but I don't want to go to a college or

university. There's this school in Brantford, Ontario, Canada, and it's on a reserve. It's run by the elder women who are the knowledge-keepers that have expertise in childbirth. They aren't midwives, so we call them grandmothers.

My own grandmother, my mother's mother on this reservation, she delivered babies all over. There're a thousand islands here, where we live on the Saint Lawrence River. And my grandmother and my aunt had a rowboat. If one of the women on one of the close islands would go into labor, her husband would stand at the tip of the island, and yell towards the mainland where my grandmother lived right next to the Catholic Church. He would yell, 'It's time! She's ready! She's starting!' My aunt and grandmother would jump into the rowboat and head off to the family and be there for the delivery.

My grandmother did a lot of births here on the reserve and actually, she worked with an obstetrician from Malone, New York, whose name was Dr. Gorman. He had a son whose name was also Dr. Gorman. He would bring his doctor bags full of supplies and he would just hand them off to my grandmother. He'd give her what she needed when he came here and replenish her with fresh supplies. And that's how they did birthing. Everybody called my grandmother, their grandmother. My aunt was always with my grandmother. And they knew my aunt would take care of the kids or help get supper started if things were still lingering. A lot of those people are getting into their seventies. My grandmother was actually told she shouldn't be delivering any more babies because she was older.

One of the ladies was from the island where I grew up, on Cornwall Island. And all her babies were born with my grandmother as the midwife. So when they told my grandmother, 'You can't do that anymore,' her friend from the island was still having babies, and she said, 'I'm not going to the hospital.' She stayed right in her garden until she started laboring, then got out of the garden, and went in the house to call my grandmother. And because my grandmother was living on the island at that time, too, she'd come right over and then her friend would have her baby. And she would be back in that garden that same night. It was so hard for those women back in the fifties and sixties. By 1960, that was the last delivery my grandmother had, because that was the lady's last child. And that would be the last baby born through my grandmother's hands. She was given an award by Dr. Gorman for her services.

My aunt and my grandmother have since passed away, and my cousin said, 'Joyce, I want to give you something. I'm going to give you a plaque. It was Tota's.' That's a Mohawk word for Grandma. She wanted to give

me this plaque, but it was lost when my aunt passed away in a house fire. Everything was lost. It was an awful tragedy.

With other women that I've talked with, my grandmother and midwives back in the early 1900s, they said when you were pregnant, 'She's buying the baby.' When you buy something, you're going to take care of it because you're putting a lot of your savings into this and trying to make it the best that you can. You're growing this baby. You're not going to drink alcohol. You're not going to do drugs.

We would watch how we walked. We wouldn't even braid our hair when we were pregnant. My mother said, 'Don't braid your hair when you go into labor.' And I always had long hair. My hair was braided, and I went into labor. And I had a hard time. My mother says, 'Your hair is your DNA, right? It's our DNA, everything. You're twisting it, and when you're going into labor, everything up here is getting twisted.' I thought, 'Oh, God, I should have asked her about that.' They say, 'Oh, that's just an Old Wives' Tale.' Well, those are Old Wives' Tales for a reason. There's virtue behind those.

They say we shouldn't be beading, using a needle and thread, when we're pregnant. What we're doing as a pregnant woman is what your baby's doing inside your belly. Even X-ray technologists have this thing they say when the mom is laying on the gurney, getting her belly ultrasound. My niece was getting her ultrasound and had her hands behind her head like the technician told her to, and the technician was putting the gel all over her belly. And the baby inside, on the ultrasound was just like her.

Barbara Hotelling:
I have a question in my mind. I'm thinking if we hadn't demoralized your culture, if we [White Colonists] hadn't viciously attacked you, if your beliefs, your knowledge, had come out into everybody's culture in the United States, what would the world look like now?

Joyce Leaf:
I don't think it would be like it is right now. You know, we talk about history and what happened when Columbus and Henry Hudson came to the New World from Europe, and what they saw when they came to our communities. They couldn't believe it, that in such a big village with so many longhouses and so many people, how everybody got along. People were in groups and they worked together. There were hunters. There were fishermen. There were gardeners. There were the grandmothers. There were the young kids learning how to shoot bows and arrows. Everybody lived in harmony. So all the guys that went out hunting and fishing would bring back the catch and another group would come and clean and skin

the deer, and everybody ate together. Then there was another group who cleaned up after.

A lot of the grandmothers, they would sit back and because they had so much knowledge, they would tell the parents of a child, 'Well, I saw your child doing this today,' to help that child to work on becoming a better bow and arrow shooter. Maybe he's a great hunter. The elders saw the potential in the people. So, they would try to work with those people to help them to be where they would be the best. Even singers, and drummers, and dancers, everybody had something they liked to do.

Like making beads. We had wampum. That was our money—the wampum, the beads. That's how we made our treaties with the Dutch, the French, and the English. And so, there were a lot of beads. Beads to us were like money for the Europeans. Our beads were everything because, it was such a delicate bead; it had to be made so meticulously. So, what they saw, maybe they couldn't believe. But then, again, you think, because they came from a war-torn country and they escaped from there to come here, they brought those old values with them. And they started instilling it into the people that they brought. And so they wanted the resources in the Western Hemisphere—the silver, the gold, the water. It was all here, and nobody laid claim to it, no king or queen. So when they came, they kind of took it upon themselves to be the kings here.

But, I think when they saw our culture, they wanted to destroy it, because the women in our community, they have a say. Not just men. Like, even my partner, he doesn't do anything without telling me. And we discuss things. He has his view. And I do have to tell you, Barbara; he was raised off the reserve. That isn't Native. And so, he has that kind of mindset. Where my views are from my mother and grandmother and my other grandmother. We have strong, traditional values. And, so, a lot of things, he doesn't understand. I just tell him, 'Jeff, you're not seeing this the way the Mohawks see things.' He says he doesn't have that mentality. But, he's learning a lot.

Barbara Hotelling:
I wonder if he enjoys life better the Mohawk way, because, being a part of a community, where each child is valued and respected for who they are, and where they are built up by the community, and sponsored and mentored? I wonder if that has rubbed off on him?

Joyce Leaf:
I think he sees that with our grandchildren now. And just even our own kids growing up from infancy right to adulthood. My family is such a big

family, but we're always gathering; we're always meeting. And we're a close-knit family, where his family is not like that. But he gets along with all my family. He just never had what his kids had. But he does everything for his kids, his grandkids. We have two of our grandchildren that we're raising because we want them to have the best. So, I think Jeff would have probably left here if he didn't like it here. His mom's family's here. Jeff grew up in Florida, California, a few different places. Then he joined the Navy.

Barbara Hotelling:
Does he like the stability that you both have now?

Joyce Leaf:
Yes, definitely.

Barbara Hotelling:
This is amazing to me because this is what I thought it might be. You've grown up in a culture where children, even in the womb, are respected. So what do you tell pregnant women during their pregnancy about connecting with their babies?

Joyce Leaf:
Well, I ask them, 'Have you connected with your baby?' And they're looking at me, like, whoa. Well, you talk to your baby. You rub your belly. You sing. And, for some, they've never thought like that. Because, see what happened through residential school, Barbara? A lot of the children were taken away when they were little, and the parents had no say. And then, they wouldn't see their kids until they came home when they're 16 years old. Even little two-year-old, three-year-old children were removed. First they were speaking their own language. Then, they actually told them, you're only going to speak English. You're not going to speak that foul language.

Barbara Hotelling:
So, that's why these young mothers don't know about connecting with their babies because they were removed from their homes and traumatized.

Joyce Leaf:
Yes. And actually, a lot of them would never speak the Mohawk language to their children because they didn't want their kids to go to school and end up being abused like they were.

Barbara Hotelling:
Has this abuse stopped?

Joyce Leaf:
Yes. In 1984, the last residential school was closed in Canada. But even for me, growing up and going to school on the reserve, we were made fun of. They would tease us, the teachers. It was awful

Barbara Hotelling:
That was so contrary to what you were used to in your culture. And that's why I had that question: What would life be like if we had known all that APPPAH knows? What would our children and future generations be like? I just feel so privileged to have gotten this information.

Joyce Leaf:
Yeah, I think, you know, people were dumb. Like, we invite anybody to come to where we worship. We have ceremonies that are longhouse. You can come over, Barbara. You could come to the ceremony with us. We invite anybody who wants to come and open up their mind and sit with us through ceremony. We have several ceremonies throughout the year, and the mid-winter ceremony's coming up in January and it's the New Year. But we're not drinking alcohol. We stir ashes and it's like, everything in the whole year, especially this year, right? All of your feelings, your hardship, your sorrows, you put it in and stir the ashes of this hard wood, ash, and you just thank the creator that you're here.

You see all your friends at your longhouse where you always do your ceremony and you dance with the people. You're always giving thanks that you're here today in this moment, here with your people, and very grateful. We bring food to a potluck. We all bring a little something to put into the big pot of soup.

Barbara Hotelling:
Community.

Joyce Leaf:
Yes. And we bring our most cherished gifts. We put them in the center of a basket and we have a game called a peach bowl game. In the game, we're playing against the Turtle Clan, and across the house is the Bear Clan and the Wolf Clan. There are families. I come from the Turtle Clan family. That was my mother's clan and her mother's clan and her mother's clan before. So, it's carried through the lineage forever. My children have that Turtle Clan. I think everybody would get along because there shouldn't be any jealousy in our culture. But there is there is jealousy.

Barbara Hotelling:
I'm thinking about the children when I ask these questions. Think of the way that we raise our children. That is how our society will lean. So, if

we had all raised children, say, the way the Mohawks had, with respect for their dignity, mentoring, all that stuff, life might not be so traumatic and we wouldn't be fighting these body memories.

Joyce Leaf:
Right. And, you know, Barbara, since we're on this topic, my grandchildren are in grades three and five. One child gets a special certificate in a quarter. But one child is singled out of the whole class. One child. 'You're the best.' See, that shouldn't happen. Already, we're instilling in our children, 'You're better than them.'

Barbara Hotelling:
Us versus them.

Joyce Leaf:
Yeah. I do not like that. Both my grandchildren have gotten the certificate. But I'm like, 'No, all those friends of yours in your class, they should have gotten one, not just you. Because you all work hard.' Some may be smarter than the others. But all deserve a certificate, because they're all trying hard. Institutionalization puts these ideas in our children's heads at such a young age.

Barbara Hotelling:
But from your culture, the children would each have their special talents recognized and honored. And they might present those talents to the rest of the class, so that the class could say, 'Gosh, you know, I can't play that instrument. But look how beautifully it's being played, or look, how well they shoot the bow and arrow. Now, I could practice and do well, but I could never shoot like that.'

Joyce Leaf:
Right?

Barbara Hotelling:
Yeah. I've got five children. I have them in a society that I don't agree with. And they don't know, I was always seen as sort of a different mother. And I wanted to raise my children with these principles of collaboration and mentoring and appreciation. I should have brought them to your reservation. What do you do with young mothers to instill these concepts that are so true and dear to you?

Joyce Leaf: To tell you the truth, Barbara, the first time I started doing prenatal classes and I brought culture into it, some of the young moms in there were very upset, because they had never heard it before. I had this one couple who stayed behind after class. The mother asked me, 'Where

did you get this information—what you're talking about, all this cultural stuff, and feeling our babies, and trying to know them?' A lot of our people don't speak the language anymore. But even if you know how to say hello, or something simple in the language, say it. At least your baby's hearing it. The mom was almost in tears and said, 'I never heard this before and I don't know why.'

And I said, 'This is the way I was raised. This is how my mother taught me and her mother, my grandmother. They would tell me things.' My grandmother would say, 'Don't ever let anybody tell you what you can and can't do. Don't listen to them.' And so I never did. I mean, I wouldn't be a rebel. But, I went through what I could do what I wanted to do, and I did it. I had to prove myself to the teacher, and whoever, But in teaching these women, and seeing how upset they were, I thought, 'Oh my God, I really have to keep pushing this because they don't even know this stuff.' And in my head, I was thinking, 'I wonder how many other women don't know these things that should be carried on?' And then, there are generations in their families where it's already been lost. It got cut off at residential schools.

Also a lot of people who came back from residential school became alcoholics because they were belittled so much and abused, sexually, physically, mentally, and spiritually. It was a very dark time. The government wanted to tear down all those residential schools. And we said, 'No, you're not tearing them down because that's a part of who we are now today because of what you did. Now you think you're going to tear it down and forget about it? No, you're not going to forget about this.' So we said, 'Truth and reconciliation. Say you're sorry.' Then the Prime Minister didn't even want to say he was sorry. There was no way. He wasn't going to do that.

Anyway, I kept doing the classes and I was getting bigger classes. Not only was the mom and the partner there, but I said, 'Bring your own mother. Bring your aunties. Bring whoever you want. Just tell me how many are coming so I have enough food for everybody to eat.' Because whenever we gather as Mohawks, we eat. We've got to feed the soul. And the grandmothers would come. They really liked what they were hearing, bringing the culture back.

No one knows, when she finds out she's having a baby, [our culture says] she should go and talk to her mother, because her mother's going to name her baby. She should have a Mohawk name for her baby, because the baby is Mohawk. Me and my children, we all have our Mohawk names. My name comes from my great aunt who passed on. My daughter has my grandmother's name. My other daughter, I named her. My mother named my son after her uncle. So we keep the name in the family, but they're old

names. And it's something for you, too, as a Mohawk person, to have a Mohawk name, not just an English name, like Joyce. I have my Mohawk name and that means a lot to me.

Barbara Hotelling:
And what is your Mohawk name?

Joyce Leaf:
My Mohawk name is Wa ta hi ios tha, which translates in Mohawk to mean, 'She makes a nice path.'

Barbara Hotelling:
And you are making a nice path for the ones coming. This has been a pleasure. This is what I wanted to know. This was what I was curious about.

Joyce Leaf:
Yeah, good. I like the curiosity.

Barbara Hotelling:
I just think that if your [cultural] ways hadn't been interfered with, there would be a haven for everyone who respects children in life.

Joyce Leaf:
Yeah, we start with the little kids. We try. We have a thanksgiving prayer every day. You say thanksgiving like when you want a church to pray. Every morning, when I wake up and open my eyes, I go outside. Even today, it was ice cold, but I didn't stay out there. But just to go outside and breathe in the fresh air. And to say, 'Thank you, Lord, for another day, another day of life, undeserved.' I'm thankful for that, and my family. That's what I do.

Barbara Hotelling;
And if everyone were to live the way you live, Joyce, it would decrease a lot of our illnesses. It would decrease a lot of the stress hormones that constantly attack our organs and make us unable to function.

Joyce Leaf:
Yeah. There's a lot of that, right Barbara?

Barbara Hotelling:
Oh yes, ma'am, there is. But you have community.

Joyce Leaf:

Yes, and you know, there are some awesome programs that are coming out. And a lot of young people are getting involved. They're looking for a name. They want their Mohawk name and they're willing to go back. Even in their adulthood. They want to go back to that ceremony so they can get a name, because it wasn't given to them. They missed that. So they're going back, and they're getting it. And it's helping them to overcome their misfortunes. It's really helping them.

We started having Mohawk language classes. Our people, our history, Barbara, we have never had books up until probably 17 years ago. We started writing books about our Mohawk culture and our language, because our people are orators. Everything was all passed down through storytelling. And when the State and Federal Government came in, we said, 'We're Mohawks. We want funding for our programs. We need a school. We need school busses.'

They came right over, and they brought their best historians to sit with the elder people. Because the Elders talked about when George Washington was in Albany, and they made the treaties. This elder, he would tell them the story, but he would include things that were happening around the area, as well. And the historians matched everything up and said, 'Yes, he's telling the truth, because this was going on at that time.' And that's how the historians on every reservation could connect. Just to say, 'We're not liars. We're telling the truth.'

Our great grandfathers were at the signing when George Washington made the treaties with our people. Because right from here, northern New York, all the way down to Long Island, that was our land, right down to the ocean. And so, that's one of the land claims. But you see, people who live off our reservation and are not natives, they're taking more and more land, and are coming closer to our reservation. And we're like, 'Whoa! Stay back! You're getting too close, and this is not your land.' This is all we have left. And so, we've got a committee of people who just watch the land, and then the chiefs.

There's a lot that has been taken. But we still have language. There're not very many speakers left. And as a matter of fact, an elder approached me last week, and said, 'Do you speak?' I said, 'Well, I'm not a good speaker, but I can understand it.' And I've been trying to teach myself again, just by listening to the radio, because they have little language courses. And unlike the elder people I talk to, they'll say something in Mohawk, and they want me to answer back in Mohawk. Sometimes I can answer them back. And they look at me and say, 'Speak Mohawk. You speak it well.'

My mom, she was a broken-English speaker. She couldn't speak English well. But she could tell you a story and a half in her language. My grandmother never spoke English. Never, ever. Not one word.

Barbara Hotelling:
Oh, Joyce. I just wish that your culture and your sense of community could infuse our culture. And you know, from seeing our culture in the last four years, it has not been pretty. We've not been proud. And the whole world is worried about us.

Joyce Leaf:
Yes, they are

Barbara Hotelling:
APPPAH's information has to be instilled into our teachers, into our medical people. Thank you so much for this information. I hope we get to do it again.

Joyce Leaf:
It would be a pleasure. I'm more than willing to share and to help other people to understand that. No, we're not the drunken Indians that we're stereotyped out to be.

Barbara Hotelling:
No, no. I would love to talk with you about labor, and birth, and parenting, and how you create this sense of community with the parents you work with through those stages and phases of life. So, we will talk again. Thank you, Joyce.

Joyce Leaf:
Wonderful. Thank you, Barbara.