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Racial Justice

Tribe of Many Colors or Tribe of Many Dollars

by Dr. Al Carroll

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Tribe of Many Colors or Tribe of Many Dollars?

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Kiesha Crowther AKA “Little Grandmother” has garnered a lot of attention, over a thousand followers, perhaps millions in cash, and even more controversy in less than two years. Falsely claiming to be the “shaman” for the “Sioux Salish tribe,” Crowther has gathered an all white, mostly European “Tribe of Many Colors” around her with bizarre claims. Native activists and former followers have vowed to oppose her and expose her.

From Santa Fe to Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, and soon to that most “American Indian” of places, Palm Springs, Kiesha Crowther draws crowds of hundreds with each gathering of ceremony selling, charging from several hundred to up to \$6,000 a person. Crowther is a small red haired woman of 33, yet looks young enough to be a teenager. Adding to the strangeness, Crowther calls herself “Little Grandmother” (she is not one) and often talks in a little girl voice with fanciful (and largely false) stories about her childhood.

Crowther mixes in stories of vulnerability with dire prophecies of doom and fantastic claims, none of which are true. She claims to be the “shaman” for the “Sioux Salish tribe.” She claims to be the descendant of famous Lakota and Salish leaders, with a “fullblood Indian mother” and a grandmother supposedly on the reservation. Crowther claims to be made “shaman” by an alleged Salish elder named Falling Feathers. She claims to be recognized by dozens of

tribes from New Zealand to United States to the Arctic Circle to Scandinavia to Central America. She claims to have been recognized by Native tribes at as young as age eight and to be the fulfillment of a supposed prophecy about a “fair haired girl.” She even suggests in one video that she is the returned White Buffalo Calf Woman of Lakota prophecy, a claim sure to outrage the Plains Indian tribes that hold the prophecy sacred.

Yet not a single one of these claims are true. Most are extremely obvious lies.

Who Is The Real Kiesha Crowther?

The real Kiesha Crowther was born Kiesha Rae Kreps in Sanford, Colorado, to a white middle class background, with a truck driver father and a mother owning small businesses. Her mother’s maiden name is Rodda. The Salish tribe she claims to have ancestry from do not have a single known person named Crowther, Kreps, or Rodda, either enrolled or known to the small and close knit community. (Most Salish have Irish last names given them by missionaries. A few Salish have traditional names, but none are ever translated into English.) The Salish elders in fact issued a public statement, saying officially she is not their “shaman,” asking her to quit claiming so, and pointing out no Salish had ever even heard of her. Their statement in full is at the end of this article.

Contrary to Crowther/Krep’s claim of a “fullblood Indian” mother and grandmother, there is no evidence of any Native ancestry in her family line. Her family ancestry has been traced back to her great-grandparents from England. Every census form lists all of her ancestors as white. No one else in the family has ever claimed to be or identified as American Indian, including her mother and grandmother. The only Natives in the family are two children (with no relation by blood) adopted by an uncle near Missoula, Montana. Kiesha Crowther’s mother and other family members have in fact urged her repeatedly to quit lying about the family ancestry.

Kiesha Kreps was raised as a Mormon and baptized into the Mormon Church at age eight at the same time she claims to have been recognized by Indian tribes and living alone in the woods. Crowther was married in the Mormon Church in Littleton, Colorado, and was a practicing member of the church only two years ago. She is married with two children, but separated from her husband and estranged from her entire family due to her “calling.”

In fact, absolutely no one in her family backs her claims of Native ancestry or being a “shaman.” A source very close to the family called her a “fraud” and “elaborate liar.” Numerous stories Kiesha Crowther tells at paid ceremonies are described as “lies,” such as claiming to have lived alone in the woods, nursing a dying owl, and being recognized by tribal leaders. The young Kiesha Kreps was actually fairly popular in school and not the lonely isolated kid she claims. Crowther's stranger lies include once giving a "Viking treasure ring" to her sister, who then noted one could see the trademark symbol on it.

The same source close to the family also claims Crowther’s veterinary degree is fake and came from an online degree mill, with the "degree" printed in notebook style paper rather than the stock paper degrees generally come on. It was also confirmed an animal rescue group Crowther claimed to have started is phony. The same source says Crowther plagiarized the poems she claimed to write and largely copied the paintings and other artwork she did.

Even Kiesha Crowther’s online biography as an artist is filled with falsehoods. She claimed to have been awarded Poet of the Year in 2003, 2004, and 2005 in separate cities. The “awards” are given out by the International Society of Poets, a pay to publish outfit that will include you in vanity editions for twenty five dollars each. She claimed her poem “Reach For My Hands” was made into a song by the “Willow Folk Group.” There is no sign of such a group, but there is a Willow Folk Festival in England. She claimed one of her poems was published in a book, “Poems for Peace,” chosen by former First Lady Laura Bush. There is no sign of the book nor of Laura Bush’s involvement, unless one counts her refusing to show up at a gathering of poets reciting poems opposed to the Iraq War. Crowther’s bio also claims she was “awarded the Life Experience Bachelors and holds a Masters Degree of Art from Alameda University.” Alameda University is an unaccredited online degree mill. In a 2004 expose by CBS News, a reporter successfully got his dog awarded a degree from Alameda.

How It All Began For a Would Be Shaman

Kiesha Crowther/Krep’s claims of how she became a “shaman” have changed rapidly and dramatically in less than two years since she began. In April of 2010, Crowther made the claim she originally had gotten a phone call from a group of all the Salish elders who told her she was the “fair haired child of prophecy” and they had a sacred bundle waiting for her made centuries ago.

But in June of 2010, that account changed. She claims instead an unnamed “Sioux man” made her a shaman.

That same month, Crowther also claimed she was made shaman by a group of “grandmothers” of both the Salish and “Sioux” tribes.

(Note for non-Native people: Natives generally don’t refer to the “Sioux” since this is an outdated outsider’s term. The actual tribes are called the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda, often called collectively the Lakota. There are dozens of Lakota bands at reservations and reserves. The Salish is an entirely different people and culture.)

In December 2010, Crowther’s story changed dramatically. No longer was there any mention of groups of women elders, nor of “Sioux men.” Instead she now claims there was a single Salish elder she calls Falling Feathers who made her “shaman for the Sioux and Salish tribes.”

There is no evidence at all that Falling Feathers ever existed, other than Crowther’s claims. Crowther claims he was an important elder, so widely known she assumed he was speaking for all Salish elders. The Salish elders have never heard of him and neither have any other Salish contacted for this article. His alleged name does not fit typical Salish names, which are either Irish or traditional Salish names not translated into English.

Conveniently, Crowther claims Falling Feathers recently died. There is no mention on tribal sites of a prominent elder dying recently. Crowther’s supporter, manager, and longtime friend Jennifer Ferraro also claims Falling Feathers was a member of the “governing council” for the “Confederated Sioux Salish.” Neither of those exists, but there is a tribal council for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai. The Lakota bands and tribes, as mentioned before, are spread across over two dozen reservations and reserves.

Only a few days after her December statement, Crowther changed her story in the most drastic way yet. She now claims to have never been teaching Native ways at all. This despite dressing up in American Indian regalia (though it was a shirt only worn by Native males), using what she seems to have believed was American Indian face paint, using what she claims was a Native pipe, and claiming her initiation came from Native elders, or alternately, a single Native elder who has passed away no one else ever heard of.

Crowther has also continually claimed the endorsement of numerous indigenous elders and other religious leaders, without evidence. Many of those she claims are Native elders actually are imposters.

She claims the endorsement of Cherokee elders. None of the traditional Cherokee elders in the Eastern Band ever heard of her.

She claims to have been recognized as a shaman by “lamas of Nepal and Tibet.” There are hundreds of such Buddhist teachers, but the only one she ever named was Lakha Lama, whom she met in Sweden. Lakha Lama gave her a blessing when Crowther asked for one, but this is neither an endorsement nor recognition, only kind words. Buddhist lamas, like American Indian traditionalists, also condemn teaching for a fee, especially very high fees as Crowther does.

Crowther also for a time claimed Sammi elders in Sweden authorized and endorsed her. Then her claim was removed from her websites. She further claimed Inuit elders gave her a crystal “from the North Pole” and that she was “giving the crystal back to the Sammi” when she buried the crystal in Sweden. There is no land, only ice at the North Pole. Crystals do not form in ice, only in land. Geologists consulted for this story say it likely is an ordinary crystal bought in a shop for less than 200 dollars, one dug up by strip mining.

On one of her visits to Sweden she claimed all Native tribes recognized and endorsed her, and that she was shaman for all of them. Since there are over 500 tribes in the US alone, the absurdity of this claim is obvious.

More recently, Crowther also claimed she was made shaman by a “Sioux” named Grandmother Lota or Lootha. Crowther also claims to be related to “Sioux” she calls Ciqalah Lotah and Ciqala Jensen. Fluent Lakota speakers we spoke to pointed out those words do not exist in the Lakota language. No one in any of the Lakota communities we contacted ever heard of Crowther or the people she claims to be related to or authorized her.

Crowther also claims the endorsement of Don Alejandro Cirilo Perez, sometimes called Wandering Wolf. Perez is a Mayan leader who appears on a number of New Age sites. However, there is no evidence of Perez ever endorsing Crowther. Perez is actually on record as strongly disagreeing and even mocking the claims of Crowther and other that the world will end in 2012. The maker of a documentary on Perez and Crowther denounced in fierce terms

the “exploitation” of Perez by New Ager such as Crowther.

Crowther also is an associate of and claims the endorsement of two imposters who falsely claim to be Native elders, Adam DeArmon, a white New Age operator in Sedona, and John Kimmey, a white New Ager barred from the Hopi reservation and condemned by Hopi spiritual leaders for selling ceremony and making false claims.

The (All White) Tribe of Many Colors

Why would a self styled “shaman” who spent most of two years claiming Native elders authorized her suddenly claims to have never been doing Native teachings? Numerous family and friends of Crowther’s followers, as well as former followers, began to ask Native activists about the authenticity of her claims. By September of 2010, the chorus of criticism began to rise and put Crowther and her management on the defensive.

Crowther’s following she dubbed the Tribe of Many Colors has some striking characteristics. It has absolutely no Native members at all (including Crowther.) Outside of a member of Crowther’s management team, all seem to be exclusively white. Much like the Tea Party, they are also prone to throwing around the claim that they are hated supposedly for being white.

Such a claim falls apart because many of her critics are themselves white, especially former followers. The claim is even more striking because of the racism in some of the imagery and words used by Crowther and her “tribe.” In one trip to Sweden, Crowther spoke about the alleged superiority of Swedish people over all others. Crowther frequently claims all Native elders, or even all Native people, are supporting her, waiting for her, and depend upon her and her message even for their very survival. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Most Natives never heard of her. Those that have are strongly opposed to her.

Who is behind Crowther’s rapid rise among New Age leaders? Our source very close to the family says Crowther has no computer skills nor business or organizing acumen, nothing that could account for her success except a vivid imagination. The same source attributes everything Crowther has done to two people and one group; Adam DeArmon AKA Adam Yellowbird, a white New Age operator in Sedona; Santa Fe Soul, which sponsors some of Crowther’s talks; and especially Crowther’s longtime friend Jennifer Ferraro. Our source

described Fierro as a failed performance artist who claims to be Native but is actually Italian and Greek. Online discussions between Crowther and Ferraro seem to show Ferraro as the real brains of the operation, the power behind the throne, her manager, website operator, and even her director. Crowther defers to her in public talks, and Ferraro frequently talks in one messages to Crowther like a mother to a small child.

Our source close to the family is worried the Tribe of Many Colors will "become another Jonestown" and is at a loss for how her family can get her to see sense. Whether the "tribe" self destruct violently is yet to be seen, but they are extraordinarily intolerant of dissent or criticism of any kind. Its website was heavily censored, with any daring to question Crowther kicked out. Recently their website was so overwhelmed by dealing with criticism it was taken down entirely. Crowther's inner circle, especially Ferraro, have begun throwing around legal threats at any who dare to critique Crowther. Ferraro, though she is not a lawyer, sent threats to sue to at least five people. The "tribe" also sent infiltrators to sites critical to Crowther to gather information on critics.

There are currently plans for a book by Crowther, and two documentaries, one favorable to her and one critical. There are also ongoing plans for protests of Crowther's ceremony selling by Native activists and her many non-Native critics. The Salish tribal council is considering legal action. The controversy is not going away.

Dr. Al Carroll is a historian, professor, former Fulbright Scholar, and activist for Native causes. His first book is *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags: American Indian Veterans From Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War* from University of Nebraska Press.

Research for this article includes contributions by numerous activists, former followers, Sky Davis and T. Tavares, and a source very close to the Crowther family. Annika Banfeld translated articles and radio interviews from Swedish to English.

Statement of the Salish Elders:

"The Culture and Elders Committee of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation protect the intangible cultural resources of the tribes including language, songs, stories etc.

"No tribal Elders or elders have met with nor do they condone the claims and actions made by Kiesha Crowther.

"She is not their 'shaman', she has no right to claim this title and the Elders and elders of CSKT of the Flathead Reservation would like her to cease and desist immediately from making such false claims that erode the traditions that members of the CSKT Culture and Elders Committee are trying to preserve."

The posting of this statement came with the permission and urging of the Salish elders. Anyone doubting this message's authenticity can contact the Flathead Reservation.

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The hoodwinking continues

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by Just Another NDN

Tue, Jan 11, 2011 3:51PM

Crowther seems pretty scared about being exposed. Already they are censoring this article on her forum and kicking out anyone mentioning it.

200-300 bucks a person X 200 people a gig= 40,000 an appearance. If she's charging 6,000 X 200 people that's 1.2 MILLION for one little fake- ceremony.

Yep, a mulitmillionaire con artist.

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Ndnguest

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by Ndnguest

Tue, Jan 11, 2011 6:15PM

I noticed also when people started questioning this keisha person her facebook and websites quickly shut down and reopened several days later with entirely different stories. As a matter of fact I was banned from all of them. And all I did was ask keisha if she was really Indian. Hmmm, it's not looking good for this little white fraud. Keep up the good work Dr. Carroll, these thieving white hucksters need to be exposed.

Ndnguest