



## Sword of Peace Ceremony

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*Recreating Prince Henry's voyage, Italian yachtswoman Laura Zolo transported the symbolic Sword of Peace from Orkney to Nova Scotia, where it was ceremoniously presented to the Mi'kmaq Nation on September 9th, 2000. This report was published in Roslin O Roslin, Autumn 2000 (Vol 3 No 21).*

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### The Sword of Rita Joe

By Rob Cohn

Saturday September 9th shall go down as an historic day for the Clan Sinclair. The sun shone brightly upon the upper reaches of Boylston Park, Guysborough, Nova Scotia. The few clouds only served to keep away the debilitating heat which was the hallmark of the Prince Henry Sinclair Memorial Ceremony held on that same site in another age: July 14th, 1998.



The attendance list was more or less the same as yesterday, with a few notable additions, especially Grand Chief Ben Sylliboy, Don Julien, and Rita Joe. Despite the presence of sparkingly accoutered Lords and Ladies, the person with the most individual impact on the event and on every individual in attendance was Mi'kmaq poet laureate Rita Joe. She is said to speak with the voice of her people - and yesterday it sure felt as though she did.

Jack Sinclair was leading us through much ceremony, although the proceedings were an interesting blend of the ancient and the modern, the formal and the folksy, the physical and the symbolic. Innocuously enough, Rita was listed in the official programme as "Poem Presentation". There was entertainment scattered through the programme, but there was also ceremony. I'm not sure which she was intended to be, but it was certainly was much more than entertainment.

Rita was going to read from a couple of her existing pieces, but when she showed up Jack and his brother Bill worked her over good. Rita agreed to compose something especially for the occasion. *[Not quite right, she had told Jack, after she heard that Malcolm was coming, that she would compose a poem especially for the occasion. Ed.]*



When she was introduced there was a warm reception and Rita spoke some passionate words of thanks and introduction, and then:

**Acknowledgement of the Mi'kmaq Nation's Reception  
to all Immigrants to Atlantic Canada**

**On September 9, 2000 I will welcome  
The Venetian Mariners from Italy  
Laura Zolo and Captain Jack  
Who end the heroic voyage in Guysborough  
From many lands they have visited  
Then to ours**

**I am a Mi'kmaq Representative  
Like in the days of 1398  
The offered hand is still in place  
The other on my heart as a sign of friendship  
I am the nation known the world over  
Who helped the broken men, their bodies wasted by scurvy  
My food, your food  
My medicine, your medicine  
My fear the same as yours for the unknown**

**Today there is no fear but a welcome knowledge  
That we are friends as it should be  
And the view that is offered by Antonio Zeno in 1398  
The friendly reception by the Mi'kmaq Nation  
I thank him today  
And from the voyage of Prince Henry Sinclair and the Clan  
The acknowledging history set the Mi'kmaq as compassionate  
I appreciate and know as true**

**Rita Joe, Sept 6, 2000**

As Rita spoke she was nervous (of course - what artist isn't?) but the symptoms of her Parkinson's which she works hard to keep at bay began to take her over - but that only caused her to work harder to get the words out and her intellect fought the physical within her. And indeed, the power of her voice transcended all and in that voice could be clearly heard the voice of her entire nation, all that was, is and will be.

There was not a person there who did not feel this. Laura Zolo was completely overcome, and not for the last time, by Rita Joe that day. It was beautiful to watch the instant bond that formed between them in those moments, and to watch it play out over the rest of the afternoon. The moment set the tone for many more moments which fulfilled all of the promise of the day.



When Malcolm, Chief of the Clan Sinclair handed The Sword of Peace to Ben Sylliboy, Grand Chief of the Mi'kmaq Nation, who in turn handed it to Don Julien, Spiritual Leader of the Nation, the symbolic was as manifest as the physical and the moment was everything that Malcolm, Niven, Bill and/or Jack could have wished when they cooked up this mad scheme.

Congratulations to all, there has been some hard going here in Nova Scotia for the Clan Sinclair. The tide has turned...ironic that it may have again taken an Italian Mariner to make that happen...

