

Out of Touch and Loving It

Like Carol Geddes, Brian Maracle is a spokesperson for the Native community who has achieved prominence in Canadian public life. He was five when his family left the Six Nations Grand River Territory, near Brantford, Ontario, for New York State. In time he earned two college degrees, lived in Vancouver then in Ottawa, and made a name for himself in journalism as a reporter for The Globe and Mail and host of the CBC radio program Our Native Land. Specializing in aboriginal issues, he also became an activist in the Native self-government movement. But when in 1993 legislative changes to the Indian Act made it possible for Maracle and his wife to move back to their original reserves (unfortunately in two different places, hers in British Columbia and his in Ontario), the two decided to "go home." Maracle moved alone into a 150-year-old log house near where he had lived as a child. Soon he had traded his newspapers, television watching and the Internet for hard physical labour: installing a woodstove, chopping firewood, and repairing his new home. But old habits die hard. In the midst of his new life on the "rez," Maracle was soon drawn again to politics and issues — the complicated matters of how to preserve the traditional Mohawk culture, language and spirituality, and how to govern the band according to Native, not European, models. Then a year after his return, Maracle told of his new life in a well-received book, Back on the Rez: Finding the Way Home (1996). From it comes our selection.

1 Over the past two weeks I have been so busy unpacking and trying to get settled that I have begun to lose touch with the outside world. Just today, for instance, I realized I have not read a newspaper since I moved here.

2 Two weeks without reading a paper! It doesn't seem possible. I have read a newspaper, often two, almost every day for the past thirty years. A small forest must have been cut down to provide the newsprint for all the papers I've read. And now that I've finally broken the daily newspaper habit, I realize I don't miss the petty sensationalism, the staged events, the obsession with celebrities and the filler copy that passes for news.

3 I haven't completely lost touch, though. I listen to CBC Radio so I know something about "the news." I talk long-distance with people

from the outside who presumably still read newspapers every day, and if another World War started, I assume they'd tell me about it. In that way, I'm becoming a lot like the people around me. Most of my neighbours and relatives don't read the paper every day and they don't seem to be suffering. The people in the coffee shops here don't talk about Bosnia or the Bloc Québécois.

4 The broken newspaper habit, though, is just one measure of the way I have dropped out of one world and entered another. I realized today, for example, that I have not hooked my computer back up to the Internet. Before I moved I was plugged into all the computer newsgroups about my two passions in life — fishing and native affairs. But there was so much information on the systems it took me forty-five minutes a day just to skim it. Most of the postings on this electronic bulletin board were, for me, useless and irrelevant. I'm not terribly interested, for example, in an ongoing argument over the derivation of some word in the Dakota language, and I don't care what trout flies are working right now on the upper stretch of some river in Idaho.

5 And that was just reading the stuff! Heaven forbid if I actually replied to a message and got locked into one of those discussions that go on forever. I fought the urge to reply to some of the more inane and provocative postings because I knew I would end up sparring with some argumentative know-it-all who just has to have the last word (in other words, someone just like me).

6 So, in spite of all the dire warnings about how people who are not "plugged in" will be left behind in the coming revolution, I will not plug myself back into the Internet. I will continue, instead, to use my computer as a glorified typewriter and I don't care if I ever get back onto the information highway.

7 And as for getting plugged back into the world of television, I have stopped fiddling with the television antenna and I have given up trying to get CBC-TV. I will content myself therefore with the two-and-a-half channels I do get — and I will plan on doing a lot more reading.

8 The only problem is that getting something good to read will not be easy around here. Decent newspapers are hard to come by, there is no bookstore on the reserve and the band library, to put it as charitably as I can, needs a lot of work. But at least the corner stores here sell magazines. Boy, do they ever. At the front of the rack you'll find their top-of-the-line reading material — *The National Enquirer*, *Tattoo World* and *True Confessions*. At the back of the rack you'll find *Penthouse*, *Swank* and *Hustler*. But you won't find *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine* or even *People* magazine. You have to drive seven miles into Brantford for those. And even in Brantford you won't find *Harper's*, *Saturday Night* or *The New Yorker*. For those you have to drive thirty miles into Hamilton. I can give up the newspaper, the Internet and CBC-TV, but I can't give up magazines, so

