Looking Behind

By Dr. Jeanette Weaskus

As the activism to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline unrolls across our nation, it brings to mind our forebears who once fought this same good fight. As future leaders and contributors to your tribes and nations, knowing those iconic figures and what they did to pave the way for all who came after them is both respectful and necessary.

In the last few years, two of our civil rights leaders who founded the American Indian Movement have passed away with Russell Means, being the first to die and Vernon Bellecourt next. Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt are both in their 70s and still fighting for land, treaty rights, and other indigenous issues as elders. All the founding fathers of AIM made it their life’s work to fight for indigenous causes and rights.

The activist efforts made now to protect the water for the Standing Rock Sioux Nation have gone global. They made an encampment like the Oglala had done in 1973 at Wounded Knee II and just like then, the gathering of tribal people successfully shined a media spotlight on wrongdoing. Many of the activists then and now are college students who are making a difference in how the world perceives Native peoples.

Sacred Stone encampment protestors in the global media gaze are passionate warriors fighting for the protection of our Mother, the Earth. It has always been the teachings of our elders that the Earth is our Mother and she is the only mother we will ever have so treat her with tender loving care. And in looking back at what our elders of the AIM era have done, their wisdom and techniques remain relevant and useful to us today.