

South Dakota songs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szsNPT2dYwc>

<https://www.echoesofpeace.org/water-is-life>

Water Is Life - Mni Wičoni (song for Standing Rock)

Water Is Life

Sara Thomsen

0:00 / 4:32

1. [Water Is Life](#) 4:32

[Free](#)

ABOUT THIS SONG

Water Is Life (Mni Wičoni)

This song is inspired by and in tribute to the [Standing Rock Sioux Tribe](#) and all the tribes, nations, native and non-native people coming together to protect the land and water threatened by the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The song came to me on my return from Standing Rock. That morning before leaving, a meadowlark was singing right outside my tent. "Be a lark from the meadow. Be a lark from this meadow," I heard it sing. We, too, can be larks from the meadow. We, too, can sing in the new day.

You are welcome to use and share this song (for non-commercial use). I ask only that you do so with intention and solidarity with the water protectors at Standing Rock and all corners of the globe! Please support water and environmental protection efforts in all the ways you can. —ST

ABOUT THE CHORUS

The chorus contains two Lakota phrases:

Mni wičoni (mini we-cho-nee) —"Water is life."

Mitakuye Oyasin (mee-dah-koo-yeh o-yah-seen)—"All My Relations"

My gratitude to Jeremy Davis, of Lakota and Anishinaabe heritage, who —after my initial sharing of this song at choir practice—suggested adding the phrase "Mitakuye Oyasin" and helped me incorporate it into the song.

[Water Is Life \(Melody and lyric sheet\)](#) 214 KB

ABOUT THE LAKOTA PHRASE "MITAKUYE OYASIN"

"When we say *Mitakuye Oyasin*, 'All Our Relations,' many people don't understand the meaning of those words. The phrase *Mitakuye Oyasin* has a bigger meaning than just our blood relatives. Yes, it's true; we are all one human race. But the word *Mitakuye* means relations and *Oyasin* means more than family, more than a Nation, more than all of humankind, everything that has a spirit. The Earth herself, *Maka Unci*, is our relation, and so is the sky, Grandfather Sky, and so is the Buffalo and so are each of the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, those that swim, those that fly, the root nation and the crawling beings who share the world with us. *Mitakuye Oyasin* refers to the interconnectedness of all beings and all things. We are all interconnected. We are all One."

—Chief Arvol Looking Horse

from his book *White Buffalo Teachings* (Dreamkeepers Press, 2001)

Arvol Looking Horse is the 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe and a spiritual leader of the Sioux Nation. "We are the river, and the river is us. We have no choice but to stand up."

— LaDonna Brave Bull Allard

Founder of Sacred Stone Camp

Quote from [article in Yes! Magazine](#)

LYRICS

Water Is Life - Mni Wičoni —words & music by Sara Thomsen

All my relations, come
Every nation, come
All my relations under the sun
We are one

We are praying, come
We are praying, come
We are the song and we are the drum
We are one

We are the river, come
We are the river, come
We are the boat, the paddle, the shore
We are one

Chorus:

Mni wičoni, sing (*Mitakuye Oyasin...*)

Mni wičoni, sing

Mni wičoni, "water is life"

for everything

We are the water, sing
We are the water, sing
We are the water
We are where all life begins

We are the ancient ones
We are the ancient ones
In your breath and bones we sing on
We are one

We are the meadow, come
We are the meadow, come
We are the lark that sings
the new day has begun

We are the new day, run, run, run
We are the new day, run, run, run
We are the old and we are the young
We are one

Chorus

We are the earth and sky
We are the thunder cries
We are the fire,
We are the light in your eyes

We are standing strong
Like a rock, like a stone
On this sacred ground we belong
We are home

Chorus

All my relations, come
Every nation, come
All my relations under the sun
We are one

“We are the river, and the river is us. We have no choice but to stand up.”

— LaDonna Brave Bull Allard
Founder of Sacred Stone Camp
Quote from [article in Yes! Magazine](#)



Why the Founder of Standing Rock Sioux Camp Can't Forget the Whitestone Massacre

We must remember we are part of a larger story. We are still here. We are still fighting for our lives on our own land.



LaDonna Brave Bull Allard posted Sep 03, 2016

On this day, 153 years ago, my great-great-grandmother Nape Hote Win (Mary Big Moccasin) survived the bloodiest conflict between the Sioux Nations and the U.S. Army ever on North Dakota soil. An estimated 300 to 400 of our people were killed in the Inyan Ska (Whitestone) Massacre, far more than at Wounded Knee. But very few know the story.

As we struggle for our lives today against the Dakota Access pipeline, I remember her. We cannot forget our stories of survival.

Just 50 miles east of here, in 1863, nearly 4,000 Yanktonais, Isanti (Santee), and Hunkpapa gathered alongside a lake in southeastern North Dakota, near present-day Ellendale, for an intertribal buffalo hunt to prepare for winter. It was a time of celebration and ceremony—a time to pray for the coming year, meet relatives, arrange marriages, and make plans for winter camps. Many refugees from the 1862 uprising in Minnesota, mostly women and children, had been taken in as family. Mary's father, Oyate Tawa, was one of the 38 Dah'kotah hanged in Mankato, Minnesota, less than a year earlier, in the largest mass execution in the country's history. Brigadier General Alfred Sully and soldiers came to Dakota Territory looking for the Santee who had fled the uprising. This was part of a broader U.S. military expedition to promote white settlement in the eastern Dakotas and protect access to the [Montana](#) gold fields via the [Missouri River](#).

As my great-great-grandmother Mary Big Moccasin told the story, the attack came the day after the big hunt, when spirits were high. The sun was setting and everyone was sharing an evening meal when Sully's soldiers surrounded the camp on Whitestone Hill. In the chaos that ensued, people tied their children to their horses and dogs and fled. Mary was 9 years old. As she ran, she was shot in the hip and went down. She laid there until morning, when a soldier found her. As he loaded her into a wagon, she heard her relatives moaning and crying on the battlefield. She was taken to a prisoner of war camp in Crow Creek where she stayed until her release in 1870.

Where the Cannonball River joins the Missouri River, at the site of our camp today to stop the Dakota Access pipeline, there used to be a whirlpool that created large, spherical sandstone formations. The river's true name is Inyan Wakangapi Wakpa, River that Makes the Sacred Stones, and we have named the site of our resistance on my family's land the Sacred Stone Camp. The stones are not created anymore, ever since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged the mouth of the Cannonball River and flooded the area in the late 1950s as they finished the Oahe dam. They killed a portion of our sacred river.

I was a young girl when the floods came and desecrated our burial sites and Sundance grounds. Our people are in that water.

This river holds the story of my entire life.

I remember hauling our water from it in big milk jugs on our horses. I remember the excitement each time my uncle would wrap his body in cloth and climb the trees on the river's banks to pull out a honeycomb for the family—our only source of sugar. Now the river water is no longer safe to drink. What kind of world do we live in?

Look north and east now, toward the construction sites where they plan to drill under the Missouri River any day now, and you can see the old Sundance grounds, burial grounds, and Arikara village sites that the pipeline would destroy. Below the cliffs you can see the remnants of the place that made our sacred stones.

Of the 380 archeological sites that face desecration along the entire pipeline route, from North Dakota to Illinois, 26 of them are right here at the confluence of these two rivers. It is a historic trading ground, a place held sacred not only by the Sioux Nations, but also the Arikara, the Mandan, and the Northern Cheyenne.

Again, it is the U.S. Army Corps that is allowing these sites to be destroyed.

The U.S. government is wiping out our most important cultural and spiritual areas. And as it erases our footprint from the world, it erases us as a people. These sites must be protected, or our world will end, it is that simple. Our young people have a right to know who they are. They have a right to language, to culture, to tradition. The way they learn these things is through connection to our lands and our history.

If we allow an oil company to dig through and destroy our histories, our ancestors, our hearts and souls as a people, is that not genocide?

Today, on this same sacred land, over 100 tribes have come together to stand in prayer and solidarity in defiance of the black snake. And more keep coming. This is the first gathering of the Oceti Sakowin (Sioux tribes) since the Battle of the Greasy Grass (Battle of Little Bighorn) 140 years ago. When we first established the Sacred Stone Camp on April 1 to stop the pipeline through prayer and non-violent direct action, I did not know what would happen. But our prayers were answered.

We must remember we are part of a larger story. We are still here. We are still fighting for our lives, 153 years after my great-great-grandmother Mary watched as our people were senselessly murdered. We should not have to fight so hard to survive on our own lands.

My father is buried at the top of the hill, overlooking our camp on the riverbank below. My son is buried there, too. Two years ago, when Dakota Access first came, I looked at the pipeline map and knew that my entire world was in danger. If we allow this pipeline, we will lose everything.

We are the river, and the river is us. We have no choice but to stand up.

Today, we honor all those who died or lost loved ones in the massacre on Whitestone Hill. Today, we honor all those who have survived centuries of struggle. Today, we stand together in prayer to demand a future for our people.

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LaDonna Brave Bull Allard wrote this article for [YES! Magazine](#). LaDonna is the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's Section 106 Historic Preservation Officer. She is also the Founder and Director of the Sacred Stone Camp, a spirit camp established in April 2016 on her family's land on the Standing Rock Reservation, as a center of cultural preservation and spiritual resistance to the Dakota Access pipeline.

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