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Notes on Contributing Visual Artists:

Patricia Deadman was born in Oshweken, Ontario on Six Nations Reserve in 1961. She holds a Fine Art Diploma (Fanshawe College, London, Ontario, 1986), and a B.F.A. (U Windsor, 1988). She has participated in the photography residence at the Banff Centre (1991), and her solo exhibitions include Fringe Momentum (Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1990); A Little Bit of Dance, (The Photo Club, Philadelphia, PA, 1992); and This Land Reserved (Woodstock Art Gallery, Woodstock, Ontario, 1995). Recent group exhibitions include: AlterNative: Contemporary Photo Compositions (McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg, Ontario, Canada); and Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (Ottawa, 1995-96); Be It So It Remains in Our Minds (Oh Canada Project, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada, 1996); Young Contemporaries (London Regional Art and Historical Museum, London, Ontario, travelling 1996-1998); Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices (Ripley Center, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, travelling 1996-1998); Godi Nigoka: The Women's Mind (Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario, 1997), and Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art (MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1999). Her work is in numerous public collections including the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Alberta; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver British Columbia; Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario; and the Indian Art Centre, Hull, Quebec. She was also the guest curator of the exhibition, stackingLANDclaims, at the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Alberta in 1997. Deadman lives and works in London, Ontario (FAX: 519-459-7491).

Rosalie Favell was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1958. She received her Bachelor of Applied Arts in Photographic Arts/Media Studies from Ryerson Polytechnic Institute (Toronto, 1984), and her M.F.A. (U New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, 1998). Her solo exhibitions include: Portrait in Blood (Native Indian and Inuit Photographers Association Gallery, Hamilton, Ontario, 1993); Living Evidence (Dundurn Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan, travelling 1994-95); The Manitoba Studio Series (Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1996); The Longing and Not Belonging (The Photographers Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, travelling 1998-99). Selected group exhibitions include: Traditions of Looking (Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1994); Positives and Negatives: Native American Photographers (Street Level Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland, travelling, 1995-1997); A Generous View (Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, Manitoba, 1997); We are Many, We are One: An Exhibition of Contemporary Native American Art (University Art Gallery, U of Wisconsin, La Crosse, travelling 1997-1998); In Absentia (Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1998), and Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art (MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1999). Favell has received numerous awards from the Manitoba Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. Her work is in numerous collections including the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba; the Manitoba Arts Council Art Bank, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Air Canada, Montreal, Quebec; Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia; and the Indian Art Centre, Hull, Quebec. Favell lives and works in Elliot Lake Ontario (at the White Mountain Academy. Contact: 1-800-368-8655 – ext. 212).

Daphne Odjig was born on Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, 1919. She has exhibited her paintings since 1967 when she held her first solo exhibition at the Lakehead Art Centre, Thunder Bay (formerly Port Arthur), Ontario. Since then, she has been included in numerous solo exhibitions at the Robertson Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario; Assiniboia Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan; Shayne Gallery, Montreal, Quebec; Gallery Phillip and Gallery Gervik, Toronto, Ontario; and Hanlon Gallery, Kelowna, British Columbia. In 1985, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery organized and circulated throughout Ontario the exhibition Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective 1946-1985. Selected group exhibitions included Treaty Numbers 23, 287, 1171 (Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1972); From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada (Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario, 1976); Contemporary Native Art of Canada -- The Woodland Indians (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario, travelling internationally, 1976); One Hundred Years of Native American Painting (Oklahoma Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1975); Renewal: Masterworks of Contemporary Indian Art from the National Museum of Man (Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1982); Normal Morriseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, 1984); Two Worlds (MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1985); Woodlands: Contemporary Art of the Anishnabe (Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1989); In the Shadow of the Sun (Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull Quebec, 1989); and Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art (MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1999). Odjig's work is in numerous private and public collections including the Canada Council Art Bank; Ottawa, Canada; Indian Art Centre, Hull, Quebec; the Michael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinberg, Ontario; MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan; Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec; Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, West Bay, Ontario; Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario; University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario; and Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford Ontario. Odjig has been honoured with many awards. In 1987, she was appointed a member of the Order of Canada, and was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Art in 1989. Odjig lives and works in Penticton, British Columbia (for further information contact: Leo Ann Martin, Head Curator, MacKenzie Art Gallery, 3475 Albert Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, SAS 6X6 -- PHONE: 306-584-4284).

COVER ARTIST: John Laford (see notes, p. 64).
EDITORIAL

The thought that the elders gave me is that we have to realize that we are these marvelous magical beings. That we as human beings are magical creative beings and we have the power to create, the power to express ourselves. And through our art we are able to speak very strongly about who we are. Our arts are a manifestation of the way we are, the way we think and who we are as a people.


Baqah
This issue of Rampike features the work of Indigenous writers and artists from many diverse First Nations in territories now known as Canada, the United States, Hawai'i, Aotearoa (which the colonizers renamed New Zealand), and Australia. Some of these writers and artists are well known internationally both within and beyond the Indigenous arts community. Others are published here for the first time.

The writers and artists included in this issue come from diverse cultures and histories, from the far north of Canada to the south Pacific islands of Aotearoa. Despite our differences, what we share is our connection to our homelands, our histories of colonization, genocide, and displacement, and our will to survive and pass the treasures of our cultures to future generations. Most of us believe our creative work has a function well beyond self-expression. It expresses the values and aesthetics of our people and connects us to them and to our ancestors and future generations. It is a form of activism that both maintains and affirms who we are and protests against colonization and assimilation. It is a form of sharing, of giving back, of reaffirming kinship, of connecting with the sacredness of creation.

We use music, words, and phrases as medicine and gifts to console and repair our souls. Sometimes in ritual and sometimes in humour. It is in our dance, our composition, and our visual arts that we give thanks for those medicines and gifts. And we do this and we render this all in the rhythm of the creator.


Some of you, many of you, may not have experienced before the beauty, complexity, humour, and diversity of our arts. For the most part, there is a form of what Paula Gunn Allen terms "intellectual apartheid" as well as what I would call "aesthetic apartheid" operating around the world. Our creative work, and there is a lot of it, going back thousands and thousands of years and forward to this day, continues to be segregated, denied, oppressed, ignored, silenced. And yet, it is essential to our communities and will never disappear, just as we remain, forever part of the land upon which the creator placed us.

All of us must feel the burden of history. We all must feel the need to restore our own art, to rehabilitate our art, to reconstruct our art, to reaffirm our art, to reestablish our own arts and culture. To create opportunities for all those people who are heirs to those traditions to define for themselves, to define for ourselves, for me to define for myself what I wish to happen, what you wish to happen, what we all wish to happen for the people.


What I wish to happen is for you to consider and enjoy the arts and literature presented here. (After all, our works were "post-modern" before there was even such a thing as "modern!") Beyond that I ask that you support Indigenous arts. Go to our art exhibits, buy our books, listen to our music, attend our plays, concerts, pow wows, and festivals. Teach our work in your schools or better yet, let us. Include it in your magazines, journals, exhibits, and festivals. Publish it. Include it. Consider it. Remember it.

This is merely a small taste of the bounty of Indigenous arts. May you enjoy it and hunger for more.

Chi meegwetch to Rampike and to Karl Jirgens for his ongoing support of Indigenous arts, to all of the writers and artists who contributed to this issue, and to you our audience.

N'dnawaendaungunuk, Kateri Akiwenzie Damm

(Editor's note: Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm is Anishnaabekwe from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation on the Saugeen Peninsula in Ontario, Canada – KJ).
Ho'akū'e Art Exhibition; East West Center Gallery
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photographers: Kimo Cashman and Stan Tomita
WHAT IS NATIVE HAWAIIAN ART?
by Haunani-Kay Trask


As Native peoples, we share a common history, many cultural practices and values, and a wealth of inheritance that once included a land and language base and an indigenous form of self-government.

Of course, Western contact and colonization drastically diminished our numbers, our lands and waters, our authority structures and our sense of both collectivity and individuality. But contact also impoverished us spiritually, confusing and demeaning the indigenous understanding of our ways of life. For many millions of us first contact meant certain death and dismemberment. Now, as survivors of the Holocaust of the Americas, we are remnants of what we once were. Each and every day, we engage the struggle for First Nations survival.

Artistic expression is part of our cultural and physical continuity as nations. For example, as indigenous people, we naturally belong to the land of our origins. We are the natural people, as natural as caribou, jaguars, and whales; as berries, corn, and taro. We exist within a larger natural universe as part of a cycle of relations, not as the dominant force beyond the physical and spiritual worlds of our nations.

Genealogy—the connection to all life—is our first grounding. However, we are now a subjugated part of other nations, those that invaded and colonized our homelands. These settler nations are neither spiritually nor genealogically connected to their lands of origin, but neither are they connected to our lands of origin. In indigenous terms, settlers are not integrated into the circle of human and natural life, nor do they desire such integration and relationship. Rather, they are separated from and, they argue, superior to the spiritual and physical and cultural world of Native places and Native peoples. For settlers, human and natural life is formed as a hierarchy, with Europeans and Americans at the top and animals and indigenous peoples at the bottom. No relational circle of life is possible in Western cultures.

But whether we Native nations like it or not, settlers govern the worlds we inhabit. As a result of colonization, indigenous societies have been deformed and, in many cases, obliterated altogether. And, predictably, first contact policies of removal and extermination continue to this day. Witness the ongoing destruction of our lands and waters, the confinements of our people to reservations and prisons, the removal of our children, the banning of our languages, ceremonies, healing arts, even our naming. In this colonized world, capitalism is the settler economic system; violent individualism informs the settler social system; unrestrained subjugation of nature to aggressive humans undergirds the dominant, settler culture. Simply said, predation rather than conservation drives the engine of the world now.

Given the historical trespass that has created the modern canvas of our nations, we continually struggle with questions of how to perpetuate our national artistic resources, and our aesthetic inheritance, both as individual artists and as inheritors of Native cultures and genealogies under siege.

We want to know, for example, what defines Native art. Is it driven and shaped by resistance, by political or aesthetic issues, by gender and age and tribe? Is art as a category of creativity so separate from tradition that it is, so to speak, beyond questions of cultural practice or even of the Native nation’s historical moments? Is art defined or confined by Native traditions or is Native art even informed by tradition? Better yet, should Native art have anything at all to do with tradition? And before these questions arise, who speaks with authority about Native art, who should speak with authority? Perhaps the latter question is more direct. Are Natives allowed to speak about Native art? Are we in a position to speak? Do we control our own voices, thus enabling us to speak? Are there any venues for us to speak? Is there an audience, a community of listeners, for us?

These questions weighed heavily on my mind when, as Director of the Center for Hawaiian Studies, I convened a committee in 1997 to advise and eventually resist an agency of the state of Hawai‘i which granted our Center a quarter of a million dollars for original art pieces to be housed in the just completed Hawaiian Studies building at the University of Hawai‘i campus in Honolulu.

The actors in this drama included 10 Art Committee members which I selected, a large and growing and very attentive archipelago-wide community of Native artists, and the architect who designed our Center and who had his own aesthetic ideas about what should be show-cased in the building.
Title of art work: Ho'i Ka Wai

Woven Photograph: "Ho'i Ka Wai" calls for the waters to return to the kahawai (streams), lo'i (irrigated terraces), 'āina (land), muliwai (estuaries), and kānaka maoli (Native people). We need to protect our natural resources, so the wai (fresh water) will continue to feed Hawai'i's people the traditional, life-sustaining food of the land and sea.

Photographer: Kapulani Landgraf

Artist: Kapulani Landgraf

Medium: Hand-woven silver gelatin collage

Dimensions: 58.5 inches (height) x 92.5 inches (length)

Location: Resource Room, Centre for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
We were fortunate in one very important sense. State funding for the arts in Hawai‘i is tied to a portion of the budget for selected state buildings. Because our building had been chosen for art commissions, we were not engaged in a major funding drive, except to the extent that we wanted to ensure commissions were given to Native artists. But that, in itself, became something of a struggle since only a handful of Native artists are registered with the State of Hawai‘i Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Given that registration with the Foundation is a requirement for commissions, our Committee decided the first priority would be to enroll Natives as eligible artists. The Foundation’s bureaucrats, however, had his own candidate in mind, the same Hawaiian artist who had received most of the commissions over the years and whose work, although elegant, was characterized by large marble sculptures decidedly influenced by his European training.

But resisting the agency’s choice was an easy task compared to the difficulty of registering Hawaiian artists. First, we needed to locate them across our archipelago. Then, we needed to organize them, urging their attendance at a Saturday session in our building in Honolulu where we distributed materials about the various themes, including the Native Gods which represented each of the building’s classrooms and offices. And finally, we needed to encourage the artists to register with the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts since commissions could only be awarded to registered artists.

The Committee, meanwhile, met regularly with the architect and the agency bureaucrat, always wrangling over what constituted acceptable art pieces; what, in fact, art "meant," that is, Native Hawaiian art. Although the committee had more non-Native than Native members, they were all, to a person, committed to giving commissions only to Native artists. When I selected the committee, I had kept Native participation to a minimum because any Hawaiian artists on the Committee were ineligible for commissions.

Eventually, our Committee selected eight Native artists. That, in itself, was a substantial victory since the largesse of money would go to eight individuals rather than one Native superstar. Additionally, by choosing eight, rather than the usual single commission, we successfully contested the latter practice. We also allowed the artists to define their own submissions rather than force them to suffer the indignity of being told what to create. As a result, some of the pieces are subversive and oppositional, some are celebratory of traditional themes, others are both subversive and celebratory. One piece uses indigenous materials; for example, Native woods, to make Native spears. Another work depicts mythic male warriors in spectacular designs on modern materials. One piece, a large black and white photo display, is extremely critical of modern land development and the destructions of sacred places that follow upon it. A foundation sculpture combines a rock phallus with a female clitoris between which water flows from a symbolic vagina. The work will be placed in the center of an oval covered with various colors of crushed coral representing different Gods of the land and sea. One of our finest artists, a woman in her early sixties, has been commissioned to create a length of Native bark cloth painted with traditional dyes made from indigenous plants and flowers. All these creations are scheduled for completion by the year 2000.

My experience with our committee revealed some common truths: questions of theme, materials, subject and message are secondary to the genealogy of the artist. If the creator is Hawaiian, the art is Hawaiian.

Thus, Native art can only be created by Native people. Notice that subject matter — whether the art in question depicts Native themes or is made from Native materials — is subordinated to the genealogy of the artist. We could think of this as an extension of the identifying question of who is Native, or indigenous. The simple, obvious answer all over the world is that indigenous people are the First people of the land. Of course, this prior status continues to be opposed by settler governments who try to divide and define us by blood quantum or by Western documentation, like birth certificates. But Native people are perfectly capable of deciding for themselves who is, and is not, Native.

The subsequent question, which appeared many times during the Committee’s disagreements with the State agency’s representative, was simply this: what is worthy of a State commission? This issue actually hid a deeper one: namely, what constitutes “acceptable” art.

But “acceptable” art, as Natives know, tends to be that which is “acceptable” within the colonizer’s value system. Certainly, this is what Western hegemony establishes: what is, and is not, acceptable; what is, and is not, fundable. Marble sculpture, as an example, is more acceptable and therefore more worthy of commissions than bark cloth. This is another way of alleging that “high” arts or “bourgeois” art forms should predominate, or maintain hegemony over lower art forms, otherwise understood as the familiar Western hierarchical distinction between arts and crafts. There is also a sense that fine art, such as marble, has a permanent quality, but crafts, by definition, are for everyday use and are likely to be impermanent.
Extending this dichotomy to disparities of prestige, then, we find that male masters attain the "highest" art forms and, predictably, females are engaged in "lower" art forms. Thus trivial art, by definition, is done by women; major art forms are those engaged by men. Another way of apprehending this hierarchy is through the distinction between applied and fine arts. The former is utilitarian and functional; the latter, intellectual and contemplative. Painting and sculpture belong to the latter; weaving and pottery to the former. Generally, high, or fine arts are engaged in by the non-Native ruling class; lesser or applied arts are done by the lower classes, including those categorized as poor, dispossessed aborigines who romanticize their alleged spiritual connections to the land. Sometimes, Native people are feminized but this seems to be a result of our colonized status, rather than an independent influence.

Complicating this dichotomy is the false problem of preservation versus perpetuation. To me, preservation denotes a form of embalming for the nefarious purposes of the entertainment and publishing industries. Perpetuation of our peoples and lands is what engages Native people each day of our lives. To perpetuate rather than preserve our nations, that is our purpose. By contrast, preservation suggests a pickling process whereby the "extinct Native" is sealed in a museum jar of toxic fluid never breathing or evolving. Native arts must be perpetuated through our living societies, not preserved like stuffed animals for the entertainment of non-Natives in museums and side-shows.

Hawaiian art, then, is identified in terms of our community. The question we posed was simple: for whom do we make art? We answered, for ourselves; for Hawaiians. Here, we define who can honestly be said to create Hawaiian art, and for whom that art is created. In both instances, artist and audience are Hawaiian; that is, Native.

This definition, predictably, created conflicts with the State Foundation and their staff. They didn't quite understand the art we were defending. And generally, they didn't like it. For example, our metaphors escaped them. They didn't know our ancient Gods and their various manifestations in the natural world. Hawaiian cosmology was unfamiliar, strange, perhaps even bizarre. After all, in Western ideology there is no link, other than domination, between humans and animals, or between humans and nature in general. That animals could be forms of divinity, as they are in Hawaiian culture, only proves how primitive or childlike we Natives must be. And even for those individual non-Natives who are less arrogant, the entire genealogical connection that joins human beings to the natural world is certainly foreign. Given our cultural grounding, no prior assumptions or understandings were present to smooth our path. Each moment was a struggle, each interaction a kind of first contact.

Beyond selecting the art pieces for our Hawaiian Studies building, we believed that community-based art also implies art education. To that end, we curated an art exhibit, called Ho'okūʻē, meaning "to create resistance." The exhibit was accompanied by a series of panels discussing various issues that often inform our art, such as land development, cultural exploitation, and militarization of our islands. To ensure that Hawaiians, especially our young people, viewed the exhibit, we raised funds to bus Hawaiian students from rural communities to the urban University.

Our intention was to engage young Hawaiians in a kind of art education, and to give Native students a sense that the University, and our Hawaiian Studies building in particular, belonged to them. My brief experience with ensuring that our building became a space for Native artists underscored a deep trust in all Native people know: we will forever be subjugated to the vast powers of the dominant culture. Given our oppressed conditions, then, what we choose to do will generally constitute the only contribution we make in our lifetime. Of course, a single life is short indeed, but when taken together with the lifetimes of our indigenous people, the span of life we are speaking about is that of the collective, the Nation. It is this collective we must ever keep in mind.

Notes:
1. Two people contributed immeasurably to my understanding of Native art. April Hākūlani Drezel, a superb Hawaiian painter, helped me to understand the nature of Hawaiian art and the contexts and problems defining our struggles as Native people in the arts. Karen Kosato, painter and educator now teaching art at Boise State University in Idaho, was critical in helping me to understand many of the distinctions between arts and crafts, the alleged "permanency" of fine art and the "impermanency" of crafts, and the importance of community art education.
2. Despite some of the conflicts we experienced with the State Foundation staff, the Foundation's committee was generally supportive, particularly in awarding our Center more money than usually given to art projects in selected state building.

Haunani-Kay Trask is an indigenous nationalist, political organizer, poet, and professor of Hawaiian Studies at U of Hawai'i Manoa. She is the author of 3 books including Light in the Crevice Never Seen (poetry), From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i (political essays), Director of the award-winning documentary Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation (1993), and member of the Ke Lāhui Hawai'i sovereignty initiative, Trask has represented her nation at the UN in Geneva and throughout the Pacific and the Americas. Trask was also a fellow with the Pacific Basin Research Center at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard U (1998-99).
Into our light I will go forever
by Haunani-Kay Trask

Into our light
I will go forever.

Into our seaweed
clouds and saltwarm
seabirds.

Into our windswept
'ehu kai, burnt
sands gleaming.

Into our sanctuaries
of hushed bamboo,
awash in amber.

Into the passion
of our parted Ko‘olau,
luminous vulva.

Into Kāne’s pendulous
breadfruit, resinous
with semen.

Into our wetlands
of He‘eia,
bubbling black mud.

Into our spangled,
blue-leaved taro,
flooded with wai.

Into Waiāhole,
chattering with rains
and silvered fish.

Into our shallows
of Kualoa,
translucent Akua.

Into the hum of
reef-ringed Ka‘a‘awa,
pungent with limu.

Into our corals of
far Kahana, sea-cave
of Hina.

Into our chambered
springs of Punalu‘u,
ginger misting.

Into the songs of
lost Lā‘ie, cool
light haunting.

Into murmuring
Malaekahana,
plumed sands chanting.

Into the sheen
of flickering Hale‘iwa,
pearled with salt.

Into the wa‘a of
Kanaloa, voyaging
moana nui.

Into our sovereign suns,
drunk on the mana
of Hawai‘i.
Glossary:
Aku: god, supernatural, divine
'ehu kai: sea spray, foam
Hale'iwa: small community on the north shore of O'ahu island; literally, house of frigate birds
He'eia: fish land division on the windward, Ko'olau side of the island of O'ahu; the place where the souls of the dead leap into the sea
Hina: goddess, the moon
Ka'au-wa: one of 16 traditional land divisions (ahupua'a) in the Ko'olau area of O'ahu island
Kahana: a valley, bay, stream on O'ahu
Kalaloa: major Hawaiian male deity of the Pacific Ocean
Kūkini: major Hawaiian male deity of the land; Kūkini appeared in many manifestations, including breadfruit and banana
Ko'olau: the windward sides of Hawaiian islands
Kualoa: area on the windward side of O'ahu, considered one of the most sacred places on the island
Lā'ie: land section and bay on the windward side of O'ahu
Limu: general name for all plants living under water, salt or fresh
Malaekahana: land division and stream near Kahuku on O'ahu's north shore
Mana: divine power
Moana nui: the deep ocean; literally big sea
Punalu'u: district on O'ahu island and Hawai'i island; on the latter island, famous for black sand beaches
taro: starchy tuber that is the staple of the Hawaiian diet; metaphorically, tao is the parent of the Hawaiian people
wai'a canoe
wai: water
Wailākea: land division on the windward or Ko'olau side of O'ahu island

Title of work: Ho'opulapula - this installation represents the sources of life and new growth including the life of our nation.
Artist: Ipshení Nipoz
Medium: multi-media - water, pohaku (rock), one 'sand', 'ili'i (small stones), Kapukaua ferns, and landscaping.
Dimensions: 51 feet (length) x 8 feet 6 inches (height) x 25 feet (depth).
Location: Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
Photographer: Kapulani Landgraf
TWO POEMS
by Jim Northrup

Jim Northrup, is an Anishnabe writer, film-maker, journalist, artist, radio commentator, and poet who lives the traditional lifestyle in northern Minnesota. Among his many works Walking the Red Road was awarded the Minnesota Book Award and the Northeast Minnesota Book Award. Northrup’s short story “Jeremiah, Jesse and Dan” won the Native American Press Association Best Feature Story Award (1987). That same year, he also won the Lake Superior Contemporary Writers Series award for Culture Clash. Northrup’s The Red Road Follies has been nominated for a Minnesota Book Award in the non-fiction category, and his “Fond du Lac Follies” was named Best Column at the 1999 Native American Journalists Association convention. Jim Northrup’s film With Reservations, won an award at the Dreamspeakers Native Film Festival as well as at Red Earth (1997). For more information on Jim Northrup as well as many other first nations writers, check this website: http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/northrup

WAHBEGAN

Didja ever hear a sound
smell something,
taste something,
that brought you back
to Vietnam, instantly?
Didja ever wonder
when it would end?
It ended for my brother
he died in the war
but didn’t fall
down for fifteen tortured years
His flashbacks are over,
another casualty whose name
will never be on the Wall
some can only find peace
in death
The sound of his family
weeping
The sound of the flowers
didn’t comfort us
The taste in my mouth
still sours me
How about a memorial
for those who made it
through the war
but still died
before their time?

QUARTER CENTURY AGO

What’s it like to be an aging warrior,
a graying grunt
the body catching up to your old man eyes
it means feeling pain that started
with a bang 25 years ago
the pain of watching a foxhole friend
get blown to shit right in front of you
The explosion drills into your memory
we didn’t know it then but
we were making fuel for flashbacks
Haven’t killed anyone in 25 years,
more importantly, I’ve wanted to but didn’t
Look around, how many know what it feels like to stand up and say fuck it
in the middle of a fucking firefight
How many know the crack... boom sound
of someone shooting at you?
How many realize that someone missed
There is pride in knowing you could
do it again, if you really had too
But, let’s not do that war thing again.
MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina Collection.
*Big Horn Gives Birth to a Calf (1970)* by Daphne Odjig. Acrylic on Canvas, 62.2 x 91.4 cm. *MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina Collection.*
**Pillow Box 1** (1999) by Rosalie Favell  
Lightbox, 85.0 x 66.0 cm (image)  
Collection of artist

**Pillow Box 3** (1999) by Rosalie Favell  
Lightbox, 85.0 x 66.0 cm (image)  
Collection of artist
Whet Dreams (1999) by Patricia Deadman
Installation: CD, speakers, veils, bed, pine & cedar
600.0 x 450.0 x 570.0 cm
Collection of the artist

Whet Dreams (1999) by Patricia Deadman
Installation: CD, speakers, veils, bed, pine & cedar
600.0 x 450.0 x 570.0 cm (detail)
Collection of the artist
IS CHANGE GOOD?
by Rolland Nadjiwon
A Talk Presented at the "Within These Walls" Conference: University of Windsor, June 1999.

Wahjeh...meno geehiguk (Welcome to a good day) The context of this storytelling event I do not remember, except that Mabel and I were driving, looking at old places Mabel remembered as a child.

"Do you know how babies are born?" she asked.
Of course I knew the facts of life. Mabel had something else on her mind.
"Like this," she said. "The spirit follows the parents for two years before it is born. It follows, watching. It knows everything. Even when it is born it knows everything."
"Until it starts walking, talking. Maybe a year old. Then it forgets, falls apart what it knows."
"Then, you know, it starts learning again. If the person is old, REAL old, it will be all together again.
In between is what you call living." -- Sarris, 34.

I would now like to share with you a story by a good friend of mine who attended residential school. I think the story speaks for itself. I get stuck in buildings. I think, ever since I was a child, I always got stuck in buildings. When I was younger I didn’t understand what buildings were all about. I didn’t understand why I didn’t like buildings.

When I started school I went to a residential school, St. Ann’s Residential School in Fort Albany. I think that’s when I really began to understand that buildings are isolation. That residential school isolated me from my family and my community in the worst way. It was so close to my home I could stand at the window and see my house where my family lived. Sometimes I could stand and watch my mother walking to work at the hospital. The only time I could talk to them or be with them was on Sundays. The rest of the week that building totally dominated my life from the time I awoke in the morning until I awoke again in the morning.

I lived in that residential school, that building, until I was fifteen years old. When I finished my grade eight, I left my community and went to attend high-school in Ottawa. My whole life became one building after another. I found out that in a white community, everyone is always isolated. Those little buildings isolated everyone from the sun, the rain, the wind, and each other. Worst of all each other. Buildings stand in little rows, so close to each other and yet so far away. Everything I was learning all these years without realizing it was how to isolate myself. This was what I always understood in my heart and this was why I instinctively disliked buildings.

Today I sat in class and watched the first snow flakes of a new winter. Again I found myself in a building looking out. I felt everything I felt as a child back in St. Ann’s Residential School so many years ago.

Two days ago my mother came to visit me from my home in Fort Albany. She didn’t understand that I couldn’t be with her and visit as much as we really wanted to. She didn’t understand that a long time ago people made decisions in my life to put me inside a building that would isolate me from her and my community for the rest of my life.

I couldn’t help but think of the irony contained within my thoughts. I started out in a residential school which isolated me from everything, and today I am attending university in a building which is nothing but an old residential school for Indians. I watched a snow flake land on a concrete sill, I watched it melt into nothingness and something inside me melted also....

Scientists, cosmologists, astronomers, theoretical physicists, theoretical mathematicians, geologists, and etc., have arrived at the "conclusion" for us that the universe is 14 billion years old. Recently, however, there is new evidence that there exists in this 14 billion year old universe matter which science has determined to be much older than 14 billion years. Despite any of the overwhelming evidence of this unaccounted for matter, which discounts the theory that the universe is 14 billion years old, 14 billion is still the 'canonical' scientific fact.

Why this point? Well, Liz Chamberlain, said to me one day within the past 14 billion years, "Rolland I have you down for a keynote address on Wednesday, June 16th and you can talk. After some discussion and protestation from me on a title, Liz said to me, "Okay Rolland, here it is, 'Is Change Good?'" As has always been the destiny for 'indian' men, we have, for uncounted generations, not needed a strong faculty in the decision making part of our brain; for that we have 'indian' women. Now, two points out of 14 billion years, Liz gives me half an hour. Right. My second point; if in 14 billion years we are not able to change our ideas about those 14 billion years despite the necessary evidence to do so, then what am I hoping to do up here in half an hour? Well maybe this just might work into something. Let’s look at some more of this 'stuff'.

When Einstein, in the early 1900’s, first arrived at his theory of relativity suggesting that nothing could move beyond the speed of light, he had neglected to include the important variable of gravity. Over the next decade, he could not find a way to squeeze it into the glass slipper. In 1915 he proposed a new theory which became known as the 'general theory of relativity'. The old one 'theory of relativity' was renamed 'special theory of relativity'. Even though the first theory could not work, science refused to throw it out, just re-name it. Right. So now, are we the non-initiates left with science, language, or alchemy? Can we initiate any real change by, as in
the first example, ignoring the evidence, or, as in the second, by simply re-naming? Is the illusion of change any change?

A decade later, 1926, Werner Heisenberg formulated what has come to be known as the 'uncertainty principle'. Basically, as is the wont of science, Heisenberg was attempting to measure things at that time, the location and speed of sub-atomic particles. What he observed led him to suggest that it is not possible to measure both speed and location accurately, because, the more accurate an understanding an observer has of speed or momentum, the less the observer knows about the object's location or position. And the more accurately the observer can define the position of any object, the less accurate the observer can be about that object's momentum. Heisenberg concluded that at any point in the observation, there can never be a total certainty. What we think we know is always affected by our limited powers of observation. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle has come to be a fundamental and inescapable property of our world. Despite its philosophical controversy, this 'uncertainty principle' ended the dream of a model universe that is completely deterministic. Unfortunately, we still use the 'scientific' model as a conclusive measure and description of what we think we know a model which restricts us to permanent conclusions as truth. Perhaps I can begin to weave and tie some of these ideas together in a manner which will allow us a better look at what, at first glance, may appear unrelated.

In the literature about so called 'indians', there is always some legend/story/myth generically entitled 'creation story'. If this carries the assumption that our peoples have a creation modelled after a 14 billion year old 'big bang' or 'a supreme being' creating out of nothing, but, that is not how I am familiar with it. There may be some tribes that do have this story. To the best of how I have learned it, there was always something already there for the next phase/world to grow out of. Usually a cataclysm of some kind makes the present world uninhabitable and man, in conjunction with all the other life forms prepares for the next phase but, there is always something already there for the next one to emerge out of. Our stories are not of a static creation but of a dynamic and constantly necessarily changing which allows us to adjust and re-adjust so we may survive again and again.

My grandfather spoke our language fluently as a matter of fact while he was chief for a bit on our reservation. He would not allow English to be spoken in council meetings. He was a lay reader in the Catholic church and a member of the church choir one could say he was devout in his catholicism. When he used to take me as a child perch fishing, we would talk about so many things. On the topic of a 'supreme being', he would tell me that there was no word in our language for god in the way white people speak. He said the idea of one big superior spirit is not our idea. He said we do have a word that describes an 'old or ancient spirit' like a grandmother/grandfather who looks after us, the grandchildren, and they hold our hands while we walk through this our 'ezhatwin' our path called life. He said that is why we always refer everything to the grandmothers and grandfathers. We say 'gizhay manito' an ancient spirit. I think this makes a difference.

In addition and again in our own way, the keepers of our own knowledge will tell us that how we are looking at each other right now, only with our eyes, is not the only way we are. They will tell us we are a spirit and that this spirit is a light and that is how we truly are sometimes a body, sometimes a spirit, always both. There are unlimited stories/anecdotes amongst our people of how our people move about and communicate using spirit forms. Our knowledge tells us that as animals, plants, and minerals, we all have a spirit, a light, and we all communicate. All life form is our relatives inviolate and sacred.

Thus, can our cultural frameworks of knowing have some valid input into Einstein's dilemma of travel and communication across great distance without telephones, radios, internet, smoke signals, or flaming arrows. Am I suggesting that our people are aware of Einstein's $E = mc^2$? I don't know. Shall we bother to seriously explore it or shall we leave it at the level of boy scout campfire stories about boogie men, primitive superstition, foo balls, swamp gas, or lactose intolerance?

I would like to tell you a story about a very good friend who came from a community with no phones, no two-way radios, or electricity. The only electricity was from gasoline generators and that was usually reserved for very practical things, like watching hockey games during the long dark winter evenings. Communication over great distances was instead the responsibility of what some people call the 'medicine man' who could do a 'shaking tent'. He would build a specific lodge, enter into it, call the spirits, and communicate with whomever he had been asked to communicate with. I might mention at this point that I don't need you to believe this story; your belief cannot change it.

I was in their community the time my friend had left to work in the United States. While he was away, his mother became ill. First she lost her eyesight and then became so ill everyone in the village thought she would soon die. Without phones there was no way to contact my friend. His father who was a 'jeeski inininh,' set up his shaking tent and sent the spirits to go and get my friend, tell him his mother was very ill, and to come home right away. When my friend came into his father's shaking tent, almost everyone in the village was there visiting. His father spoke to him and to everyone's great surprise, my friend answered him in English. Their entire conversation took place with his father speaking Anishinabe and my friend speaking in English. No one in that community had ever heard English coming out from a shaking tent. For a long time, people laughed and teased my friend about his 'maheengunish' in the shaking tent.

My friend came home the next day. His mother got better soon after. My friend, at this point, decided it was best for him to stay home with his family.
Later, when he visited with me and we talked over sweet tea, he told me what had happened to him. He said he had come home from work that evening with a six pack of beer intending to have a few beers and relax. When he got home, he put his beer into the refrigerator popping one open for himself and started across to his couch in the other room. As he moved toward it he felt like he was fainting. He could feel himself getting weaker and unable to move across the floor to the sofa. Next, an otter was there and telling him to get onto his back because he was going to take my friend somewhere. My friend climbed onto the back of otter and otter took him through the floor and into the earth. My friend was naked except for otter fur around his hips and calves. That, he told me, was the animal his family always used in their medicine or their ‘strong earth’ way.

Many spirits, he said he encountered on the back of otter. Some, he said, were not so friendly and made him nervous that they would try and pull him from the back of otter. He said he was nervous even though he remembered his father and grandfather had always told him those spirits cannot touch you unless they are prepared to give you something. They must give you something if they touch you not take something. My friend said he saw many people he knew, some still alive, and some dead, all as light spirits.

Finally, after a long journey, my friend said they came to a place where there was a small light. Otter took them toward that light and they both moved so easily right into it. That is when they came up into his father’s shaking tent beside his parent’s house in his own village. He could see everyone from the village and his mother who was ill. His father told him to come home as soon as he could. Then otter took him back and he woke up on the floor of his living room right where he knew he had lain down earlier that same evening. That was all. My friend said he drank his beer and came home the next day. That is when he arrived back in the village.

Now I ask, can the colonial institutions we are compelled to deal with for our education be capable of allowing our system of knowledge and thought to co-exist in an equal capacity with their idea of a big bang 14 billion years ago, an idea known to be incorrect? Will our survival as who we are, not who someone else thinks we are, be an insurance toward our continued survival from without and from within the walls of these colonial institutions? These questions seem to be a part of our reason for being here and in this we have a great responsibility.

Even as we/speak, science is questioning itself as to the validity of Einstein’s E = mc² through the discovery of ever smaller and smaller particles like neutrons, protons, etc., that defy existing particle/wave theory, location/movement, communication and present explanations of what might constitute existence. And, in addition, what of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle that we can never be sure about anything we think we know. Well, long before people knew about Heisenberg one of our most often used words was and still is ‘maybe.’ You can’t have much more uncertainty than that, right? Maybe.

Now, let’s talk a bit about ‘the indians’. When Liz first approached me to do this talk, as I mentioned earlier, I struggled with her first suggestion for a topic which went something like ‘for an indian, every day is a good day to die’ or ‘the only good indian is a dead indian’ or ‘the only dead indian is a good indian’. I don’t recall exactly, but it all says about the same thing: there are indians. I was immediately charged with thoughts of backlash from some of our less constituted feathered fellow persons. I suggested to Liz that this might serve only to stretch the limits of already offended sensibilities. So, being a strong Indian woman, she changed my topic to the one I am using now ‘Is Change Good?’

Why did I not want to talk about the other ones well, I will now tell you what it is: I didn’t want to tell you there are no ‘indians’. First, however, before I talk about what I wasn’t going to talk about, I would like to contextualize that statement ‘there are no indians’ with some slightly salutary reflections on the supposed ‘discovery’ and the definite ‘re-naming’ of what we now call America. I want to talk about that ‘historic’ experience of contact when Columbus for the first time encountered its inhabitants and to examine some of the conditions of that first contact. It is a history we have not yet dealt with.

Antonia Gómez-Moriana points out that in a letter dated February 15, 1493 to Luis de Santangel, Christopher Columbus describes his renaming of the islands in the just-discovered Indies:

I named the first island that I found ‘San Salvador’, in honor of our Lord and Saviour who has granted me this miracle. The Indians call it ‘Guanasani’. The second island I named ‘Santa Maria de Concepcion’ and the third ‘Fernandina’, the fourth ‘Isabela’ and the fifth ‘Juana’; thus I renamed them all (Gómez-Moriana, 93).

And, thus, Columbus appropriates the already thereness and the already named of the islands and their inhabitants by renaming, a gesture which Derrida suggests constitutes the most radical act of violence.

This act of renaming allowed Columbus to claim, in the name of God and the King, the land and its inhabitants. Further, it allowed him to continue, and to describe them in terms and language which would fit the conceptions of the already foretold texts which he brought with him. In his journals in which he describes the natives, Columbus tells that:

They were poor people who lacked so much. They don’t bear arms, nor do they know them, for I showed them swords and they grabbed them by the blade, and cut themselves out of ignorance (Gómez-Moriana, 95-96).

He describes how they will, God willing, become good servants and good Christians and he will bring six of them to His Highness when he returns to Spain "so that they learn to speak" despite the fact they were already speaking their own languages.
Since that first renaming, history has attempted to convince the world that Columbus had indeed discovered something new a New World, Terra Nova. History has failed to prove this. Instead, it shows waves of old world immigrants bringing with them, from Europe, an 'already lived in' with which to reconstruct this New World.

This retrofitting, this reconstruction of the Americas is imported from old world conceptions of mercantilism and industrialism. These imports have raced unabated across America bringing with them 'bigger,' 'faster,' and the 'more expensive.' Should one consider this change a denomination of progress, relative to the original peoples? Evidence suggests the opposite: that this progress has been their crucifixion into that moment of discovery that moment of possession and dispossession. Renaming and re-description denies the reality of the original inhabitants any location of time and space in this New World. The literature, since Columbus, has named and renamed the original inhabitants, at its convenience. Suggestively put, Antonio Gómez-Moriana (1992) writes:

Our daily language practices bear the mark of all the errors, discriminations, dominations and destructions which, through language, have been and still are perpetuated and which, through a sort of cumulative sedimentation, remains with it through the centuries (89).

Further to this, Al Wahrath (1968) in his (unpublished) "Notes and An Outline for A Series of Articles on The American Indian" (for Rampike) writes, "There are no 'American Indians'." By logical extension, there are no Canadian indians, and, further, there are no indigenous indians in the Americas. Any discussion of American indians is disqualified by the error of its own primary assumption: that of the existence of American indians. American indians do not exist. They, indians, are a convenient linguistic invention of the colonizers. If, however, there is an American-Indian creation story it began in 1492.

Western thinking is about individuals who suppose that no identity supersedes that of citizenship in a state. Such juridical boundaries shatter indigenous tribal world views and redefine Anishinabe, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, and so forth into transparent categories. Western thinking, thus, not only imagines American indians, but is creating them. There are, now, in the Americas, and increasingly so, American Indian artists, American Indian art, American Indian writers, American Indian literature, American Indian Schools and Colleges, American Indian studies programs, and any number of American Indian organizations. There is a pool of individuals who respond to these categories, who are a product of these categories, who reinforce them, and who have redefined themselves, categorically, as American indians.

This new conception of self into this new American Indian category demands the creation of a new set of accompanying myths and symbols that have little, or nothing, to do with an original "tribe" context. This new, self-created "American Indian" shaman/medicine man, a bricoleur par excellence, creates the illusion that an eagle feather, any eagle feather, is independently sacred by its own nature. Objects then, and not communities of relatives, are independently capable of identifying their bearers as American "Indians." The specific stories, legends, myths, rituals, and all the particular contexts that were "sacred" for a particular tribe of people are now dispensable. The new Indian identity is publicly to swear unswerving loyalty to the Indian religion, one in which it is no longer necessary to participate in ceremonies and practices but only to swear loyalty to "the red road."

The new American Indian categories, with their new American Indian signifiers reinforcing generalized American Indian identities, allow American Indians to be written. Consequently, and paradoxically, any discussion on American Indians effectively destroys the subject from without. Indigenous peoples are then included in an imagined "outside of" their own context, outside whom they are when they name themselves. The elements that comprise specific tribal cultures are rendered transparent and invisible. What then passes for American Indians, or any resulting discussion, is already happening in an accommodation by a generalized abstraction. Tribes are renamed re-created into generalized American Indians. These generalizations in turn generalize their audience, allowing that audience an assumption of total knowledge of the "other." But, they are creating an "other" which exists only in its own abstract genesis.

Tribals have an unfragmented absorption of "other" making it difficult for tribals to deal with partial relationships. The introduction of the modern conception that tools are relationships into tribal communities carries innate fragmentation. Technology then replaces the total event of a real person to a real person relationship. One's grandmother/grandfather is thus replaced by an innumerate series of abstractions, symbols that allow one alchemically to conjure up an inside, imagining that replaces an outside and animate grandmother/grandfather. Plato's old fear becomes realized: our pretensions have successfully established outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind. We can thus effectively create Pocahontas, Dances With Wolves, and An Indian in the Cupboard. The heterogeneity of tribes in the Americas is written out of all history and who can be an "Indian" is written into the new story line, and the next new story line, and the next.

This believing or acting out an "allowed" political "story line" is a serious impediment to any new ideas or analysis. What then stands for "intellectual" on the "Indian Affairs" scene is the eternal repetition of what has been said by the more powerful whites. Indians, for that is what they become, who can mime the latest institutionalized stereotypes are systematically selected for advancement, not because they are saying anything different but because they are not, Indians/Whites are then locked into a binary relationship set by the more powerful colonizer. Being Indian is no longer being sovereign, but being not-White. Thus, the excesses of the American indian as it creates itself, also crucifies itself into that repeated act. American indians are their own fiction. There are no
"American Indians" and therefore such a discussion can only be moot and therefore, it is a good day for 'indians' to die.

As industrialized and developing countries scramble to fill an ever increasing demand for decreasing non-renewable resources, isolated areas of the globe are being rapidly colonized. Mines, dams, and commercial logging are bringing the reality of the modern world economy into contact with indigenous and tribal peoples at an ever increasing 21st century pace. Government programs for colonization, relocation, transmigration, and depopulation are drastically altering the delicate indigenous and tribal demographic balance between land and people. In many areas, the entire land base of the people is being destroyed, and with it, their way of life.

Colonization has no understanding, or sympathy, for the highly developed symbiotic relationship of tribal peoples with their environment. Most often they are viewed as aimlessly wandering around huge tracts of unused, unoccupied land. Hunters are not seen as a substantial partner in subsistence and must be domesticated to permanent household sites and wage labor, or farming, usually on land that cannot support farming, which is why they were hunters in the first instance. In either case, their integrity as a people is destroyed along with their lands. What does become clear is that the many 'other' realities which are excluded from the world system are not simple oversights but intended denials which are necessary to make someone else's world system possible. Such thinking has not changed again, and again into some distant tomorrow Liz will have me ask this same question, "Is Change Good?"

In conclusion, it was a painful acceptance of Kopernik's [Copernicus'] heliocentric planetary motion in the 1400's that altered perceptions of the solar system, it was a painful acceptance after Columbus that the world is not flat, it was a painful acceptance after Einstein that time and space is not flat, it was a painful acceptance after Heisenberg that everything is uncertain. Our people have always maintained that everything goes in circles, maybe.

Thank you for listening, thank you Liz Chamberlain for giving me a topic I can't talk about until after some far, far off tomorrow... it has been a great pleasure sharing with you... wahjeh

Works Cited:

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2 POEMS
by Rolland Nadjiwon

NOISE
i speak for you
the silence between worlds
thought in bush camps
tramp lines
guiding fat tourists
scratching and yawning
into the lake rippling of morning
painting us across
a nightblack horizon
only owls and wolves can hear
and a loon
laughing its critical loonsong
leaving me trembling
in thundersilence
where i have peered
out at you occasionally
through this vague and noisy language

PERSONAL PRONOUNS
i don't know how to talk loud
enough for you to see me
so i write hoping your four eyes
can see more than your four ears can hear
and someone will know i am in
the spaces between your thoughts
that allow me the where i need
until i thought you saw erases me
for another fleeting where i am not
and so you listen for me to move to here
where i am so you can see me
between the spaces in our i
TWO POEMS
by Aluotook Ipellie

I Shall Wait and Wait
As I stand alone in the middle of the sea ice,
The sky above gets darker by the minute.
The seal has not come yet.
It must be somewhere out there where I cannot see
it.
It must be playing in the water below the ice,
Or searching for food as I am doing now.
The seal has its life too, as I do.

I came here to bring food to my family,
So it is most important that I stay and wait.
Wait till the seal comes up to the hole below,
A hole that is filled with salt water.
Food is waiting there.

My wife and children are waiting for me too.
Waiting to be fed with the seal that has not come.

The long wait is worth every single length of time.
I shall wait until the seal arrives to breathe for life.
Then I shall push my harpoon down into the hole
As hard as I can and let the blood appear.

Then I shall pull the seal out,
Smiling with the wonderful
Feeling that food is on its way to my family,
To my wife, to my children.

They are still waiting for the moment
When fresh meat will touch their tongues
And then visit their tummies.
They certainly will enjoy the taste of the seal
That has not made an appearance yet
Through the hole below.

I shall wait and wait until it comes.

The Water Moved an Instant Before
They appeared out of the blue!
These beautiful beasts are
Feast to our eyes!
They never fail to hasten our blood!
These providers of food,
Of spearheads and oil,
We have reached their domain at last!

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The Dime-Store Injun
by Sandra Muse

They grace the covers on drugstore bookshelves
and they’ve got bodies that just make you hot
those half-dressed half-breed Injun lovers
clutching a scared white woman to their chest.

Their painted faces show their strength and anger
yet their hearts are weak for the pioneer gal
they have taken captive and fallen in love with
too savage to know their love’s doomed to fail.

They have names like "Windwalker" or "Apache Brave",
"Rides Too Far" or "Potawatimie Jim"
always turning on their warrior brothers
just to save the life of their quivering paleface.

Modern-day paleface women are still held captive
clutching these cheap romance novels to breast
sighing over the raven-haired muscular Redskins
thinking that life was once really like this.

These dime-store paperback hard-body Injuns
that any red-blooded girl would gladly fall for
ride and fight bravely through these cheap novels
pot-bellied husbands ain’t got nothing on them.
TWO TRADITIONAL STORIES as told by Peter Migwans

THE GREAT SPIRIT AND GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

In the very beginning of time there was nothing - only the Great Spirit. When the Great Spirit looked into the blackness, he saw nothing. And when he listened, he heard not a sound. The Great Spirit was alone in the vast emptiness of the universe.

As the Great Spirit moved along, he began to ponder. I am not lonesome he thought, but what good is power if I do not use it to make a good world, with creatures to inhabit it? So, with a wave of his hand, the Spirit caused the waters to pour forth from the heavens and cover the land. From this water he knew he could create all of the life that was to be.

"And now," he called to his power, "let there be beings to live in the water." From that moment on there were large and small fish swimming in the deep water, then snails and mussels and frogs and turtles and crawfish.

"And now there should be creatures to live on the water," the Great Spirit told his power. Then, from out of the darkness the Spirit could hear splashing, as loons, geese and ducks moved about in their watery world.

Not content with merely hearing the creatures he had created, the Great Spirit called upon his power to fashion a light so he could see them as well. At once a great round ball rose from the east and cast a glow around the horizon. When the Great Spirit gazed upon the light and all the creatures his power had created, he was very pleased.

Then a loon paddled to where he felt a ripple in the water and called out, "I cannot see you, Great Spirit, but I know you exist, and that you must be everywhere. If you can hear me now, please listen, for I must speak with you. The water you have created is good, but birds are not the same as fish. Sometimes birds tire of swimming and like to leave the water."

"And so you shall," said the Great Spirit, waving his powerful hand. With that, all the water birds skittered along the surface of the water and soared into the air. The glow from the great ball of light was nearly blotted out by their numbers.

A snow goose was first to skim back onto the water. "Great Spirit," he called, "I do not wish to seem ungrateful, for you have given us water in which to swim, and the sky light so that we can fly...yet, there is still another request I would ask of you. Ask it then," said the Great Spirit. "It is just that when we tire of swimming and flying we would like a firm place where we could walk and build our nests." The Great Spirit smiled on the snow goose and called out, "It will come to pass," he said, "but I will need help." "Tell me how we can help," said the goose. "One of you will have to find a small piece of land and bring it to me."

So the snow goose, being the largest and swiftest of the animals living on the water, volunteered to try first. He soared high in the sky, then plunged downward, faster than the swiftest of arrows, into the water. The goose was gone a very long time, and just as it seemed he would not return, a white head broke the surface of the water, gasping. "I've returned with nothing," the snow goose murmured sadly. Then the loon tried, and after her, the mallard returned with nothing.

At long last a young coot came paddling quietly across the water. He stopped from time to time to dip his head under the water to catch small fish. "Great Spirit," said the young coot softly, "I cannot fly as high or dive as gracefully as my brothers and sisters, but maybe I can swim down and find land. I see something down there when I dip my head beneath the water. May I please try, Great Spirit?"

"Of course you may," answered the Spirit. "Do your best. No one can do better than."

The little coot thanked the Great Spirit, then dipped his head under the water and disappeared. He was gone a long time. And then the Great Spirit and the water birds saw a dark object coming toward them from beneath the water. It was the little coot! And he held something in his beak.

When the coot burst through the surface, the Great Spirit said, "What have you brought us, little coot? Did you find land?" The little coot let a tiny ball of mud fall from his beak. The Great Spirit placed the ball of mud between his hands and began to roll it until it grew larger. When the mud was too large for the Great Spirit to hold, he said, "There is nowhere to put it, water creatures, so I will once again need your help. Which one of you will allow me to place this on your back?"

All of the creatures swam forward to help. The fish weren't large enough, and their back fins sliced through the mud and broke it into pieces. The crawfish, snails, and mussels were also too tiny, and, they lived too deep in the water. At last, there was only one water creature left.

"Do you think you can help me, Grandmother Turtle?" asked the Spirit.

"I am not sure," the turtle confessed. "As you know, I am quite old, and it takes me a long time to move about. Still, I would like to try." And so the Great Spirit heaped the mud on the turtle's rounded back until Grandmother Turtle was completely hidden from view.

"From this day forward," the Great Spirit called out, "our earth will be known as our grandmother, and let your grandmother, who moves so slowly under this weight, be the only creature at home beneath the water, within the earth, or above the ground. May she also be the only one who can go anywhere by walking or swimming." And it was further decreed that Grandmother Turtle and all her descendants must move about ever so slowly, for they carry upon their backs the entire weight of the world and all its creatures.
TWENTY THOUSAND GRANDFATHERS

Shortly after original man was lowered to Mother Earth the wolf was instructed to act as brother to the
Anishinabe. Also, the Great White Buffalo as the story goes. With all stories of Creation, the White Beaver is also
mentioned.

I began to realize that all the stories go back a long ways. If man’s “life-span” (i.e.; entire existence of
humankind) was twenty-five years, then we would have to go back twenty thousand years to get even to the Ice
Age.

So, with our way being “oral,” we have to think of our Grandfathers and their stories of creation and all
the learning processes and teachings that they used, so that we can live in harmony and respect “Mother Earth.”

From the beginning of creation, everything necessary for human existence was provided. The first ‘nishnabets
were surrounded with foods, waters, and medicines. So, as we grew and developed we were given teachings to help
us understand our place on “Mother Earth” and this universe.

These ancient teachings and directions continue to hold true to this day.

I listen with awe to my elders as they pass on to me all that was passed on to them. Then I am also
charged to pass on all that I’ve heard. I have listened to a lot of creation stories in my time and as an Artist they
have helped “Create” Paintings of the “Why’s and How’s; the Four Sacred Plants, the Four Gifts of Kindness,
Sharing, Strength, and Truth.” Also, The Four Seasons, The Four Races of People, and the Circle of Life beginning
in the East, South, West and North, in that order.

Some stories or teachings we will use. The feather as the base of teachings. The feather is used to talk
about “Life.”

When we talk about “Mother Earth,” we understand the gift of women. When the Creator was finished
with Creation, he told Woman “now you are the creator, you are the keeper of Life, look after it.” Woman is the
doorway where the spirit can come into reality, she is the doorway, that is why she is sacred.

I probably could go on with these stories as I remember them, as they intertwine and overlap, and teach to
respect.

THIS EMPTY SEASON

Joseph A. Dandurand

hid in the bushes and watched little birds trying to hide beside me but I was too big and they kept telling me to
leave because this was their spot and I was intruding upon their sanctuary and why was I here in the first place.

I didn’t belong were the words that followed me as I disappeared into a creek and sat there freezing alongside
the stink of the rotting flesh of the dog salmon as they spawned themselves into a memory.

the creek stopped flowing and I had to get up and walk further up river to an old village where centuries have
eroded any sign of life and all that is left are stories made into knives and stones made into spears and there is
nothing else here, not even bones.

no, the bones are my next stop, up the hill where the highway cuts right across the dead and logging trucks race
by going to the mills up river where they spew chemicals into the water and the spawned out fish rock back and
forth in milky polluted water and the fish and their life rock back and forth and I am in our graveyard and I
walk up to my grandpa’s marker and I sit down and I remember that day when my mom called me and told me
that my grandpa shot himself in the head and that I would never see him again.

a truck races by and the rains begin and the clouds come in low and the stench of rotting dogs fades into the
musty smell of rain and the smell of the river as it begins a new tide and I am walking out of our graveyard and
I am going home and this is who I am and this is where my bones will one day belong.

little birds tell me to go away,
I do not belong they say to me,
I try desperately to fit in,
bending myself
to appear.
WHEN CULTURES UNITE
Liz Chamberlain
From "Within These Walls" Conference; University of Windsor, June 1999

Diversity Teaches Commonality

Every night during the summer months in my small village of Rolphton, my mother would speak our names aloud, "Colleen, Sherman, Colleen, Lizzie, it is time to go to the road!" Now, depending on which night it was my mother might call out different names. Since I was the youngest of twelve, I was also the most curious. I so looked forward to being a voyeur of my sibling's lives. Interestingly enough, I always had more spare time than my brothers and sisters.

It never occurred to me that I was only six. Regardless, it made me feel like I was getting the last cookie from the jar. Of course, there was no such jar. Like most Anishinabe families, the teats of any sweets are to be eaten. Snacks usually meant just one sitting, so no jar is ever required to house a skin's cookies. They will be eaten quickly, with pleasure, and a side plate of humour. We do this you see, to capture their essence of ever fresh.

For as long ago as I can remember my mother would hasten us to get off our dufts and walk the short distance to the bottom of the hill. The bottom of the hill was simultaneous with the Trans Canada highway. For many, it was simply highway seventeen. If you had a wooden bat, a small smooth rock and a fit arm, it would be quite possible to hit one of these two lanes of pavement that cut through our otherwise quiet existence.

The three or four of us that did make haste would walk while kicking the top layer of dust from the road. Whenever possible, which seemed quite frequent to me in retrospect, I would free my tender feet from my somewhat smelly and fading running shoes and eagerly make contact with the sun soaked earth. Looking back, I am convinced that I was taking a stand on some important issue. Regardless, if adults were honest they would admit, I am certain, that there is nothing more splendid than having skin of feet on top of sand.

Once at the road, our heads became like a unified pendulum within an old grandfather clock. We all looked to the right, and then to the left. Sometimes, the sun did not quite go to bed, so we held our little red hands cupped over our squinted brown eyes. Perhaps people within the many speeding cars which zoomed past, were convinced that we were there to salute them. Usually to our delight, one of us would invariably yell, "I see somebody..." and we all ran in that direction. In the stillness of the brief moment, time failed to exist. Sheer excitement welled up to overtake the space within my chest. I would have fleeting thoughts of how my bird friends felt sitting proudly atop Mrs. Poulard's hill, with their puffed-out, brilliantly coloured breasts.

With high-spirited and crafted agility that only comes with youth, we would come to an instant halt. This regret to share, was simply not a pretty sight. Four of us tired from our thoroughbred sprinting, now looking more like the horse's saddles, found ourselves completely, bent in half. For minutes, many minutes, all one could hear was puffing, puffing, and great gasps for air. Physical composure had long since abandoned us. Words were made impossible by our desert-like mouths.

Once again, came a reoccurring and dreaded thought, that we had ruined our only chance to impress a stranger. With our small, dark, and canted heads we would shyly plead the hitchhiker to come home with us for supper. It always surprised me how they each were so shocked. I thought it odd how such brave and adventurous souls had not figured it all out.

For them it seemed,

my family was the only friendly bunch
on their endless highway
which just happened to cut through our otherwise uneventful village.

Once in the house, our mother always said,

"Welcome: oh, come. Come and sit down. You must be so hungry."

The stranger would unbelievably shuffle himself forward, and obey my mother's smiling and directing eyes, to the nearest kitchen chair.

Of course, we little ones of various sizes, with still puffed out chests, grinned so widely, that only our cheeks started to pain, knocked us back to reality. And then we just stared.

"Go now, let this poor man have some privacy,"

our dear mother would say.
So like a ball of black flies we would descend upon the outdoors once again, feeling completely satisfied.
Where Oh Where Has All the Diversity Gone?
At an early age I was taught to look for diversity within my environment and like the fresh spring wind, breathe it deeply. White, Red, Yellow, Black, and combinations of all these shades of humanity came and went from my master’s kitchen. Both the cosmos and mother earth are filled with wonderful and warm lessons of the beauty of difference. Why then, do humans depend on births, weddings and death to embrace our commonality? No doubt, they are powerful experiences.

When someone close to us approaches death’s door it is true, the fragile curtain of humanity has been torn.

Mother earth is not well.
We are not safe.

We know that the ones we love, are only a breath, an exhalation away from not being.

The bittersweet beauty of knowing this unites cultures. But like the ebb and flow of the wind, these grief filled moments soon pass us by and we retreat from one another to solitary places.

The seasons uphold their responsibility and remain constant in their diversity, and how we love them. To be able to wear shorts and sandals during the hot summer. Fall enters with a joyful bluster. Our eyes become widened with its vibrant colors, and its promise of favorite sweater days. Then the time of the white blanket arrives and we become like children, full of glee. By now we are fully covered -- even our necks cannot be witnessed easily by the human eye. And spring comes just in time, rescuing us from the chill. It teaches us about starting afresh and we feel optimistic enough to try something new, perhaps even take a risk.

“Waking in the morning is made more blissful with lovely bird songs. While drinking coffee we observe our pets, all different, distinct in character and how they interact. It is not uncommon while driving, or walking to our place of work, to smile at the brown, gray and black squirrels playing tag, to appreciate the beauty in different music stations, while visually taking in the vast wonder of earth’s majestic trees. The universe is an exemplary role model for us physically manifested spirits. It is summoning us to have a relationship with the power of truth -- for our humanness makes us common. To accept the challenge of truth is a difficult and inconvenient experience. This would involve rethinking of our entire manner of life. It is a combination of our intellectual and emotional cowardice, which makes us hesitate, and at times, even snatch back our truths. We do not find truth because we do not want to -- and we know that the way to be certain of not unearthing it is to detach ourselves from it.”

Misdirected Energy
It is with humans then that we have a problem. We put out so much effort to restrict letting their differences in. On the few occasions when my mother spoke, she would part her lips, and the teaching of respect would roll off her tongue. Being of mixed blood, Anishinabe and French, if ever confronted with another’s hatred towards herself or others she would say,

“Look beyond the colour of our skin and deal with us.”

The teachings of the Wisdom Keepers are there for the taking, we need only decide if we are accepting of the experience.

The year was 1985 and I was but a young woman, still so full of innocence. I found myself in Africa. It was there in a small remote village that my mother’s teachings came to life for me. I realized that when she said,

“Deal with us.”

she literally was inviting the ones with hate in their hearts to deal with our humanity. It was at the core of self, the sacred centre of life, where cultures unite. The sacred portion of our humanness is the ultimate starting point of truth, the point from which we can all look at our lives and our connectedness to the life of the universe.

When cultures unite, in this place, they find meaning, and courage, and power. In these moments we are able to be quiet, listen to the melody of the great spirits. Out of this knowing, our desires are changed and our wills transformed. When cultures unite, and understanding is present, we all know that we need each other to listen to one another, as we speak of our deepest longings and fears; for if we find a listening point where someone is able to listen to us,

we may then be able to listen in return.

From this truth, we find our desires changing, so that diversity is made common by our humanity.

The grandfathers and grandmothers teach us that hatred has touched all our lives to some degree, and it often breeds fear and violence. The old ones say that to defuse the enemy we must learn to embrace the enemy. This reminds me of an Inuit woman named Rose. While at an HIV/AIDS conference in 1990, she shared her healing technique for family violence within her community. When called upon, she would enter the family’s home and would approach the person that was acting out of control and hug them.
Rose would not say a word, but she would hug them so tight and for so long, she became a polar bear. Eventually the hurting person would collapse in her arms.

Rose was four feet, seven inches, but had no fear of embracing the rage. The art of love was hers, for she knew no resistance. She had the gift that nurtures acceptance and allows for healing to enter the circle of life. Under five feet tall and yet, her power too strong for any degree of anger in her presence.

The ability to love is manifested in an attitude of respect. Somehow, individuals like my mother and like Rose, knew that respect is to be understood as an honouring of the harmonious interconnectedness of all life, which involves a relationship that is Spiritual, and interpersonal.

This respect is for creation, knowledge, wisdom, dignity, freedom of others, quality of life, the spirits in all things, and the grandfathers and grandmothers.

So my brothers and sisters, I shall close my thoughts for now by first asking a question and finally, to honour the oral tradition while typing on paper, I will repeat my mother’s compelling words. My question to you is, how can we as a human family, become empowered if we are focused only on how we look? As promised, my mother’s words:

"Look Beyond The Colour of Our Skin and Deal With Us."

The story never ends

Baamaa

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POEMS: 40 & 41
by Robert Sullivan

40.
I imagine my friend walking on reservation land
near the Great Lakes of South-West Ontario
ice in Winter driving the roar of Spring
and the Summer’s day before the sun
reaches Autumn and thoughts of eternal
Summertime are learnt lines
enthusiasm for words again
in her presence
and in her absence
lines singing of a free life
there

41.
crossing Grey Lynn Park
with the open scars of collapsed storm drains
warning signs great sheets of iron
across the struggling earth
I find fields on the far side
it is moving
I am moved by the space
in the city
(our backyard is so small)
am forced to think of nature
the changing course (Sonnet xviii)
I think above all of Canada
and oceanic fields

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TWO TEXTS
by Al Hunter

IN NEAH BAY
for Spirit Horse

1.
To say that there are words to describe the feelings of the ocean would be to lie. To use a language that would describe one ounce of ocean wave would be to speak the tongue yet to be spoken. There are no words...

horses in my heart.
horses in my heart.

2.
From the farthest northwest corner of this island,
of this continent, the blue sea -
emerald tides and waves of jade,
touching and caressing ancient faces of the land.
I dream of you. I think of you. I remember you.

AFTER THE SOLSTICE
The cold snap is supposed to be over. I’ve survived it well... the icy season. The solstice began on a hopeful wave of moonlight; a shift in the cycle of things.

It began a long time ago; a tiny murmur, a steady hum, until the bursting of a thousand tiny drums ended in a crescendo of crashing hearts. The path has been cold. Yet, in some indiscernible way, warm, uplifting, steady... even serene.

The crescendo was necessary, I suppose. As unstoppable as the cycle that accompanied the solstice, that will always accompany the solstice, the equinox, the solstice, the equinox again. The moon, the moon, the moon. The soft blue hands of the moon and the tenderness of hearts. It all began with the snow; then ice. The ice of the moon, the cold, cold ice of the moon... starting, beginning on the solstice. These words hard to release; not as easy as moonlight, as moonlight, as moonlight. This is my song to the moon.

There is a way to mark time. It all became easier to accept because it happened within a natural, powerful cycle of things, this cycle of things, cycle of things. Hearts moved on. The solstice of two hearts... two hearts. The solstice of many hearts. The ache does not have to mean devastation. It means I am alive.

I have watched the sun on consecutive afternoons cross the same part of the southern sky. I have watched it plainly; blue light on snow, captured in tiny crystals of ice. They have a life. There is no despair in ice. Like mirrors reflecting the light of the southern sky, or the moon high in the sky passing westward, the cycle reflects itself... myself. I need to let it pass; needing to allow the natural passage of things. I will allow it. The cold snap is over. I believe.

Memories crystallize into now, into light reflected into the future. That’s where I am. Future light. I am reflected into the future. I am already alive tomorrow.

In the light of passing afternoons, the existence of sorrow is only a temporary necessity. It will not sustain me. It will not sustain my life. It is only temporary.

The solstice has passed; the sun is on its steady rise, bringing warmth and another sense of wholeness, of life, of light, of sustenance. I believe it. I believe it. I believe.
From *AT GERONIMO’S GRAVE AND OTHER POEMS*  
by Armand Garnet Ruffo

**IN THE SIERRA BLANCA**  
Geronimo sits on a cloud  
heavy with rain  
for the cactoid earth,  
catches a shaft of light  
and slides with weariness  
down to the land  
he was forced to flee.

Geronimo walks and thinks  
kicks at a rusty can  
lying at the roadside,  
wonders if the assassins  
still gallop to the dictate  
the only good Indian  
is a dead one.

He remembers when they treated  
his Apache to a gift  
of pinion nuts seasoned  
with strychnine,  
remembers this chemical warfare  
and grimaces  
an old hate.

But now there are rumors  
things have got even worse.  
This he finds unbelievable  
and has come to see for himself.  
He’s heard they are now poisoning  
the earth  
mother herself.

Nuclear dumpsite. Low level waste  
containment. State of the art  
concrete canisters.  
English! he shakes his head  
and sees a rattle  
unraveling itself,  
forked tongue  
flicking the air.

But Geronimo understands  
what this is really about,  
because after his surrender,  
he was invited to the 1904 World’s Fair,  
where he sold his photograph for 25c  
and his autograph for 10c.  
Some asked to buy his buttons  
and talked investment,  
profit.

He smiles in this knowledge.  
He had learned much  
about white people. Learned  
what was important to them.  
But this new thing,  
as though the assassins  
were back or had never left,  
he has to see  
for himself.

**GERONIMO: THE MOVIE**  
My brother refuses to watch  
it. He says it hurts too much  
to see  
how Geronimo’s people  
were treated.  
It’s only a movie,  
I almost say,  
but don’t.

The reason  
clear as good water  
by just looking at the kids at his knee.  
Refugees  
from other reservations  
finding a home  
in his heart.

**COLD WAR HANGOVER**  
In the furthest corner of what was the USSR,  
the holocaust continues.  
During the Cold War, 140 nuclear blasts  
less than 30 miles from a village.

...and who will heal the people?

None of the people told  
so the effects  
on humans  
could be  
studied.

...and who will heal the people?

Not one healthy person in the village.  
Children born with tumors the size of baseballs.  
The order of the day.

...and who will heal the people?

In the southwest USA, the American Military  
blew up Navajo land. On the Pacific Islands  
they took turns with the French.  
This. On land belonging to Indigenous peoples  
the world over.

...and who will heal the people?
SAME OLD SONG
Sign, sign on the dotted line
and you will be mine
forever
and ever,
like the mountains
and the lakes,
the sky, the soil
and everything I take.

I will supply you with all
of your needs,
a school,
a bible,
a blanket
rations and beads.

If you can't understand me
don't worry
or whine
just heed what I say
what is yours
is mine.

So sign on the line
what more can be said
my word is law
you have nothing
to dread.

You can't resist
so don't
even try
I have cannons
and armies
cities and spies.

Oh, yes, I do have a home
it is far far away
but I like what I see
and I've decided
to stay.

GENTLY WE GO ON
There was so much I wanted then,
the woman who diarbed in moonlight
shy yet eager. So much to embrace,
I wanted to carry her past
her poverty,
a room of bare walls,
beaten furniture,
a fatherless child,
down by the shore
watching the water in the gentle night.

There was so much
in the moment of kindness
I wanted to share.
But I was frightened
and could not whisper
what I wanted
who I wanted
Or if I could
I was afraid my voice
also a wave
would break roughly
when I too found myself bound
by all that I had wanted to leave behind.

LEGEND
So the legend goes Geronimo dreamed
himself into a man
with the power of horses.
In a night when the desert closed
her eyes to conceal him,
and horses,
smart and sure-footed,
carried he and his love to happiness.

To win his daughter, her father
proposed Geronimo steal into an enemy camp
and bring back four horses.
Geronimo in turn proposed four times four.
Sixteen years old, he returned with twelve
and was given four
by his own people. The gesture
matching the deed.

The way she tells it with hope
in her own dark eyes, this modern
woman in this crowded room.
Talking of courage and kindness,
of falling in love the way a woman might,
if she were young enough,
or lived herself a life of starlight
with a man who would risk
everything.

APACHE SON
Later under the weight
of ink, I think of Carl
who had a hand in this,
on his way to the boxing club,
slapping me in the street to convince me
we must prepare
to defend ourselves,
Carl speaking of his Apache ancestors,
in the streams,
the air,
the ground below his feet,
yet seeing his earth mother pounded
with pile drivers,
covered in concrete.

Fight to save her
Save ourselves,
The elegant tactics of Goyathlay,
remembered
in this poetry of resistance.
PEEPEEGIZAEENCE
This January morning, and the eye of the hawk
upon me, perched on the back fence, framed
by the willow arbor, as though it is meant
to be, swivelling its head side to side,
waiting.

For me, oblivious to nearly everything,
stepping from the house into this special day,
while the world moves on, a new millennium
holding out its promise.

Stopped in mid stride, like the morning,
I freeze, gasp, the whiteness of my breath
against the cold. And stare, as minutes pass,
as she scans me and the horizon beyond,
and I realize that today,
on my birthday,
I have a special visitor who wishes
me well.

When is a hawk not a hawk? When is a hawk
a hawk? This, as she swoops to the ground
behind the fence, and I run to find her
gone.

WEN I LEARNE
Of my Italian blood
originating from a coastal people
I saw blood
and wept like the Madonna
for the 100 million Indian victims
of Columbus' voyage of Invasion.

A legacy marked by country, province, city,
in a celebration of Discovery.

When I learned Columbus sailed for Spain
I wept for the sins of the Spanish people,
hearing Las Casas tell of the Tainos,
the cruel and inhuman treatment
killed by horses,
tom by dogs,
cut to pieces by swords,
buried alive,
suffering exquisite tortures.

These soulless, lower forms of life, enslaved
by Christianity for their own good.

When I learned Columbus is claimed by the Jews
I wept like a Jew
for the Holocaust
for no other word can describe
the systematic extermination
of Indigenous peoples
on this side
of civilization.

FOR ALL THEIR FAILINGS
Mom sends a letter abroad,
tracks me down, tells me uncle Adam
and cousin Doug died last month.
Two boozers who could never get along
dying only weeks apart. Stranger
things have happened I guess but not lately.
I remember the time Doug beat up Adam
after they had shared a bottle of goof.
We all felt a bit sad and ashamed
to see what had become of them.

And now I admit it's been too many years
and too many miles. Indifference is all I feel,
except in the brief moment when I hear
Dad say that nobody can call molest like Doug,
can make them come to the shore and dance,
his mom say Adam phoned last night,
he's still crying over the 40 dollars
he's owed your father for the last 40 years.
When I recall that for all their failings
they were still family.

TRANSGRESSION
Who would guess?
it is the cat with the electrodes
plugged into its skull
that claws my window to visit me,
turning my slumber into the world.

Where daydream
in nightmare
at the edge under a florescent lightbulb
is a study of repetition and endurance,
locked into motion,
into tubes and wire,
a slippery white worm
hooked from sky to ceiling to brain,
useless, trying to block out
an electronic high metal hum,
a whirling fan slicing
and testing (keeping the body
cool perhaps).

In this room of monitors and lab coats,
there is nothing I can do,
for the cat, for myself,
for us,
in this experiment,
meant to benefit humanity.

Armand Garnet Ruffo’s latest book of poetry
At Geronimo’s Grave is scheduled to be published
His play A Windige Tale is set to be produced by
Big Sky Theatre in Edmonton for the 2001 season.
TWO POEMS
by Marcie Rendon

Untitled #1
she lived
while others talked
in smoky pool halls and dusty bars
she lived while others talked
in Denver
she had a Navaho
he asked, "can i buy you a drink?"
she said, "no, take me home"
he was quite surprised
it wasn't even closing time
he loved her first husband out of her
in the foothills of the Rockies
Mountain daylight
savings time
in Mission, South Dakota
a brave Lakota dude
tried to hold the whirlwind
braid a flyin, laughin
she danced
across the prairies of Nebraska
Winnebago's stompin time
Oklahoma oil wells called
49ers singin time
she lived
while others talked
a Blackfoot up Montana way took her home
to meet his ma
it didn't take her very long
she decided she slept better in the car
she quit drinkin down in Rosebud
somehow just lost the taste
but they continued talkin
and she continued livin
there was the full-blood from Ponemah
the hunter from Nett Lake
the blond-blue-eyed shinabe from White Earth
the tradish from MilleLacs
at pow-wows
old women pointed leather lips her way
old men shook their staffs in shame
younger women grabbed their men
holdin on for life
braid a flyin, laughin
she danced into the night
they gave her powers
she didn't know she had
they said she ground up elk horn
fed it to them on the sly
there was somethin in her eye
braid a twirlin, laughin
she too, wondered why
braid a flyin, laughin
she lived while others talked

Untitled #2
daughters of my grandmother's
and grandfather's dreams
you were a reality long before
your father's seed
and my passion
conceived you
on those spring and winter nites
visions of the spirit child and
fish child proceeded flesh
from my womb
and my generations
shall be as one
spirits healing
my mother's madness
my father's sadness
as the daughters of my grandmother's
and grandfather's dreams
touch hands with
wind and water
light and love
7 POEMS
by David Groulx

I Was Alone This Daydream

I.
Your feet are perfect to me
and not even Jesus
would be able to wash them

nails painted by deserts
with Van Gogh's madness

the sleep of the dead
pumping dreams in your veins
with Camusroot and Saskatoonberry

tell me what it was like
before 1961
the reservation demerol dreams

II.
Your rotting fingertips
and scarlet dreams

Come with me
back to the shack where we grew up

that was torn down with your tongue

before these memories were cut with knife
before Herodotus
gnarled in my mouth

drunk with the dead pools of your eyes

wash these little
bones from my body

III.
A face so young and pretty
standing out in the rain

standing out in the rain
with your cigarettes
wet

I answered the night
that night I swallowed it whole

IV.
These corpses I carry
heavy with the weight
of the dead
this wreck
I have looked for
this body

I lay on the grave of
a stranger

I've walled up your body
in these walls

I've smashed your body
against the bow of this wreck

V.
With every broken Sunday
in your hands
in this barbarian rain
you and I are wet

with blindness

Horsemanship

The horsemen
dead.
Passed out on the plane
his spirit whispers
to the long frozen plains.
Where Indians write poems
about the land
and suicide
and horses
on the reserve.
I've been sleeping in the land of Coyote.
The horseman snare stray cattle
in there Air Canada saddles
The Harness
I will harness you into the ground with my ancestors
I will hammer because I am angry
My sleep is restless in the snow
I cry out to you from your wilderness on Bloor
I have held your uranium all night long boiling 10,000 frozen lakes
wrapped around me like razor wire
beaten silent
I am broken but
I am angry.

This Noise Is Life
I wish I could see you again old woman
the way you spoke with your clothes
Your smoke your words
a rendition of the earth
and its power
Your wrinkled body with its wrinkled hands
spitting firewood for its own warmth
and the warmth of others.
Your blood memory goes into the earth
from which I leave
Your old grey eyes
going back to the darkness
with history dropping out of your mouth

Healing Words
For LM
memory is direction
this body is a collection of memories
she says she says
the power of naming
is our house
here is our breath
These stories are old
they have rules
these pieces
are swallowed
like stories
She tells me with her hands
she tells me with her mouth
with her eyes she looks in to the future
She keeps this knowledge
with this
she heals

I Am Here
I am here with a song
I am here with my grandfathers strong
I am here with my grandmothers strong
I am here over mountains
I am here over mountains
I am here with medicine

Drunk On This Wine
I’ve been bootlegging these broken dreams
with ribbons tangled, tangled in my hair
I’ve been rolling in your waves
with these rusted promises on the ground
I’ve been peeling memories off the dead
building long long lines
I’ve been writing poems on grave stones
and walking away with the company picnic
I’ve been looting hearts in the cemetery of dreams
and fermenting it in good wine
sometimes
I just go crazy sometimes
and follow these rails
all the way where old Ben lost his leg
drunk on the wine

sometimes
TWO POEMS
by Melissa Nataanaazbaa' Begay

AWAKE

I.
Awake, the sky is reddening...
her pomegranate lips,
like the red sandstone sculptures of home,
envelop all of me, my bone and flesh.
Awake, the sky is reddening,
his fiery kisses after a night of monsoons
ignites the dawn gone mad
the sky dripping with a thousand colors
of turquoise stone
of shimmering abalone
of my White Shell woman.

II.
Awake, the sky is reddening...
Last night the house rose within swirls of cedar smoke
The dream of a word was born here
my prayer walking across the reservation
like a lightning child
like the intricate zig zag motion
of my grandmother's weaving
The dream of a word was born here
the flickering tongue of songs
bursting inside hogans
the notes flying out the center
of the dirt packed roof
The fire fly flickers
carrying songs of
strength harmony hozho
to the outside world
where the gods can see
entrails left
after the prayer
after the lines of corn pollen
have disappeared over the dawn horizon.
DRIVE ACROSS CANYONLANDS

missing you
like it was the very first time
driving without you
without your brown hand small against mine
driving without your laughter
echoing off mesa tops
and black asphalt dreams have no where to speak

last night I rode the highways of Moab, Utah
I rolled the windows down to let in the dark evening wind

I remember. You holding out your hand, your fingertips moving
palm faced outward, you said, "baby, this what your body feels
like, smooth like the wind brushing against my hand."
I remember the absence of wind in my throat, my breath transfixed-
I remember and let her in, it's the way I speak to you, recall
your voice. I let her in for awhile to shadow my face from the
night, darkness without you.

for the very first time
driving without you
the land so quiet, music so fast
I play Hendrix for you
"little wing" it's called
and I want to fly to you
propel these little wings toward the northern stars
to be with you

for the very first time
driving without you
past lost highways
that always lead me home
past broken Indian cars
past the bones of Chuska mountains
past the sagebrush fields
past the Budweiser paper cases
that dance across the length of my rear view mirror

driving without you baby
in the sunset world of blue green turquoise shadows
in the round dance swirl of yellow stars
calling me home
missing you
for the very first time driving without you
driving without, driving, driving, driving...
TWO POEMS
by Dean Hapeta

As the Blind See
Blinded by haughty pride not in my stride -
democracy in incognito with a show - ism and
schism some like to blanche - human beings light
many flames - crime defined by partial minds
interpreted in courts controlled by men enslaved in
bigotry - police enforcing the law of a system
blighted with myopia insidious with discrimination
money is their god - money makes their world
turn - money ain't nothing but with money they
turned our world - invisible equity - biased
hypocrites - wide awake no mistake no justice but
they justify in their terms reasons for denied
partiality - it's all comin' out as the blind see

One law for all don't mean it should be the
whiteman's - some people forget what it is to be
human - vehement acts of suppression to we native
- the deceiver is driven by fear to be overcome with
overstanding - misled by selling dubious
morals from the author while questions are lost to
apathy - innocent until proven guilty - by twelve
men and women chosen from a society - incapable
of providing free choice - unquestioned morals
serve as a litmus test - for which only the sheep
believe for they haven't yet seen or heard or
understood what the righteous heed - but the blind
will see and then we'll see

This law is a redneck law - institutional racism with
blameless flaws - this justice wretched by nepotists
bigoted in concept inept and lacking depth - they
neva wanna hear it - got the masses subdued into
an only the good news mode while we get mainly
bad news on the news - well excuse me - I'm
bringing the good news 'cause I refuse to be quelled
like the moral right left or what the hell - who cares
anyway I even say it when I care - burdened with a
chip on my shoulder no' know ya place 'cause I
do - I'm so overjoyed to help the blind see

It's all comin' out as the blind see
Whakakotahi
Ko wai nga Tangata Whenua I nei motu, whakarongo ki nga karanga o nga iwi Maori, he aha te maha o te kavanatanga, I tahue koe ki nga taonga Maori, I mauria mai koe ki nga mawe nga piro, Mai rano tae noa mai ki tenei ra, he aha te mea nui o te Ao Maku e ki atu, he Tangata, he Tangata, he Tangata
1. (Planet earth 196,940,000 square miles, all over the planet earth and where ever they go they conquer the people, murder the people, take their land and then set up their own Government there after invading the people’s land and then name it what they want to name it...)
Fack New Zealand ya call me a kiwi Aotearoa the name of the country
Maori are we Tangata Whenua people of the land
Keeper of the fire Te Ahi Kaa
Indigenous People we are as you can see let's control our destiny
Shake a break the chains of despair free
Realise it's we who live and breathe do you see
Rooted on earth like the mighty kauri tree
Echad in existence I am continually
Whakawhita te ora life shines the cause to be
Brother sister people rejoice that's you and me - Whakakotahi
Kua ngaro nga tamariki o Tane Mahuta, I whakaparau te moana o Tangaroa, I takahia koutou i runga i te mana o Papatuanuku, Kati to mahi kai
2. (...)to ask black people to forgive you for killing them wholesale in Africa, in the isles of the Pacific
Nga Tangata Whenua whakarongo mai
Kia kaha kia mau ki te whenua
Kia toa kia mau ki te wairua
Mana motuhake kia inui te whenua
In the system man we have fe mash it up
Hell no I won't stop or even chill out
With the vision I'll go bug out
The imperialist colonialist all the unwelcome guests
Who lack respect we come fe make it correct
Put in spec in view what we got ta do
Free our mind cleanse our bodies from their ways
You been told I've been told a long time ago
By the whiteman his ways are the ways to go
But I know his ways I'll neva follow
Righteous he is not that's what we got we got ta know - Whakakotahi
Nga Tangata Whenua o te Ao, whakarongo, Kia tu ki te whawhau nga mea kina o tenei Ao, Kia kaha, Kia mau ki nga taonga o koutou tipuna, Kia toa te ihi te weki, Ka whawhai tonu matou ake, ake, ake, tonu e, Whakakotahi
So it's come to pass and we've seen evidently
Similar things in many continent and country
North to south the east to the west
It's a plague fuck their conquest
Nigger janglebunnies coons they call us backward
They give us a white god through a white Jesus Christ
The bible and its virtue but look at what they do
They a raped our mothers and continue to kill
But my spirit is strong we gwan do what we will
Life is to be lived for for truth to show improve
So do away with the mischief in this release we'll move
Forward neva backward
3. (...)Greed, arrogrance, cause you to pollute the earth, pollute the air, pollute the water...)
Whakakotahi
Pakeha - Waiho te Whenua, waiho te Moana, waiho Nga Tangata Whenua o te Ao Haere aut, haera atu ki Engarani, kia tere, waiho te Atea, waiho Nga tamariki
THERE MAURIORA!

1. Khalid Muhammad
2. Louis Farrakhan
3. Louis Farrakhan
TWO POEMS
by Witi Ihimaera

Ars Poetica
(First Reading, to Three People, New Zealand High Commission, London, 22 June, 1998)
Ceremonies of initiation should be conducted
with a bent towards the Bacchanalian
in tall temples filled with incense & burning tapers
icons of lust or fear engraved upon imposing walls
Priests and eunuchs should be in attendance
painted priestesses of indiscriminate age
all to stew flowers, offer prayers & sing hymnals
around the altar and the devotional multitude
The obligatory vestal virgin should enter to signal
the beginning of our long awaited poetical orgy
Instead, Roma is our Pallas Athena, glittering eyed
her words owl-like peckings at miserable morsels

Oh Nuni Tutelar
3 in the morning
The streets deserted I had forgotten
only derelicts & prostitutes are abroad in the night
forsaken lovers locked out
(and Maori attending dawn ceremonies)

Make way, Britannia, Albion, Victoria Imperatrix,
make way our pututara are braying to bring down
your wallsThe dawn is coming and with it
Magi, gift bearers from the South

Pākia mai, kake mai, homai te wai ora
ki ahaū

We have come
from the utmost ends of the earth a tribe of travellers
with our own Queen, ministers & warrior escort
to the land of our Treaty partner where
our treasures have been plundered
(and Roma & I halfway round the world
to read in a stairwell)

Make way, O Egypt, ancient Assyria, Grecia, Rome
make way our own Cleopatra comes amid you
Semiramis, Te Ariki, Imperatrix of Aotearoa
Maori women, gift bearers from the South.

Harana te toki, hui e, haumi e, taiki e

So here we are
climbing upward the Museum opening unwilling
to the dawn, the kai karanga calling, the warriors
pulling us in & Maramona asks, "How can our
culture so small survive in this treasure house of many cultures?"
The answer is simple: Godzilla was wrong
size does not matter)

Oh antiquities of Asia, make way, lions of Judah
bow down, Babylon, stela of Islam make way
give a space, Oth Nimrod, Horus, Mahomet
we are iwi Maori, gift bearers from the South
E iaonga tū mai, tū mai, tū mai

And in the great hall
for the first time we see the past before us
the treasures of our ancestors a Pariah ransom
of immense psychic power, indeed we live
with our past the ghosts among us
(How can I explain? We have always walked
backwards into our future)

Oh, ancestors, stand forever! Stand for yesterday!
Stand for today! Stand for tomorrow! Stand
for always! Stand! Stand! Stand!

Take heed, O Gods of all other worlds, numi tutelar
We come chanting, we come singing, we come
proudly from Rangiaea, there our seed was sown
We come, still voyaging by star canoes
by aurora australis

We are from savage islands, far to the south
we move through your constellations
make way and where there is one
oh Gods, there are a thousand

We are Magi, bearing gifts
and our dawn is coming

Ka Ao, ka Ao, ka awatea

Indian Woman Hair
by Dawn Dumont

Like black silk
it moves and flows
light is a prisoner
within those folds
as is her man’s eyes
when he walks in the room

she combs it when its
almost dry
sometimes braids it
loving its curliness
when braids are undone

lover’s hands
twine in those locks
he feels it brush
his face
when they make love

later
children cling to it
fat fingers curled
feeling safe and warm
on her shoulder
of hair

and when she grows old
grandchildren comb
and braid and fuss
using it as a shawl
against the cold

and always
she feels its softness
even when silken strands
turn iron-grey.
SNOW WHITE NOTHING FOR MILES
by Richard Van Camp

"Oh my woman don’t love me. My woman don’t love me," Morris droned as he hunched forward on crackly Cheezie bags. He guzzled the accelerator and the truck engine roared.
"I’m a fuckin’ cop. I’m a fuckin’ cop and I can’t get it up. I can’t get it up."
"HOW STUPID!" He sneered. "HOW GOD DAMN STUPID!"

Oh the rage—how he wanted to open the truck door, jump with his hands in the air, roll on the cold and blowing ground and scream face first into the snow as the truck rolled sideways, a rooster tail of sparks pluming the air. Maybe the snow in all her lush blanket wisdom could map his backstrap straight and pull the rage and all the nights spent in total anger from his throat and give him the hard-on an 18-year-old would be proud of.

38
"Have some time off," the Sarge had said, his beefy hand like a fat hind-quarter on Morris’ shoulder.
"Have some time off—for what? So I can fuck my wife? You took my hard-ons away!"

—the kid, Kevin,

Morris stopped himself

The kid oh god the kid.

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

Oh he should have seen it coming. They all should have seen it.

Kevin Garner kept asking for more magazines to read—not suicidal—that’s what the reports said—STABLE.

He had studied the guard log books ruthlessly after the incident and he could still smell the human smoke--
19:49 Prisoner #528 talking to himself.
19:54 Prisoner #528 crying.
20:02 Prisoner #528 whispering, "You took my dreams away. You took my dreams away."
20:19 Prisoner #528 crying.
20:27 Prisoner #528 crying.
20:39 Prisoner #528 sleeping.

and from nowhere

and Kevin (they assume)

from his socks produced matches

and created a holocaust in his cell.

But he had no hair to burn!

"CONSTABLE! THERE’S A FIRE! THE KID’S—"

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

He could bear in cell number five. Over the crackle of radio transmission. The kid screaming from his cell.

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

‘Cherries. Flick the switchgo backfack the four-way stopfack the black ice just a fuckin’ kid just a fuckin’ kid a fuckin’ self fuckin’ induced fuckin’ self fuckin’ episode of fuckin’ self immolation the kid danced just like a fuckin’ powwow dancer," the guard said, trying to sip coffee, his hands shaking so bad his hands still smoking and smelling of flesh spitting fat spitting grease oh!

George, the guard: a wife, three kids, hasn’t slept in two months without tranks and Prozac still sees the kid still sees Kevin "just like a fuckin’ powwow dancer."

No eyelids—just a kid black lungs ate fire inhaling hot crippled fingers scrunching all that was pink and hairy from his throat, trachea and lungs, vomiting flames like a dragon

—the smoke.

39

His smoke pushing black cubes through the mesh of his cell and setting off the fire alarm the fuckin’ sprinkle system going off and Rain hey it’s fuckin’ raining in here, Sarge, he wanted to yell when he ran into the cop shop dropping his hat dropping his black Mag flashlight and screaming as the guard was on all fours looking for his glasses and that yell

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

And even now he could see George’s hands a foot away from his glasses. "Where the hell are my cheaters?" the guard kept calling. His hands: liver spots and yellow finger nails, Getting old, George, Morris had time to think.

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

The scream Kevin’s scream was water shooting into his eyes, expanding, taking the shape of his skull and continuously swelling his brain to produce the roar:

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

The snow on the road was bright, a white tongue he had been driving on for the past hour, and cold, so cold he could feel it in his marrow, WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA—He turned up the heater.

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

“This kill has become a carcass,” Morris thought. He could smell the bucket of cold Kentucky Fried Chicken on the floor. It no longer smelled sweet. He rolled his side window down a pinch for fresh air. His right hand took the wheel.
while he held his palm there. His flesh burned through. Like a brand.

When Morris remembered the burning body he doused with foam, he remembered Kevin’s last words. Maybe it was the acoustics in the cell but it sounded like the voice was coming behind Kevin. Like someone was in the cell with Kevin and yelling it behind him.

When he opened the cell, Morris felt like something moved through him. Away.

Morris shivered and shook the thought away.

Icabus had told him there were 68 turns in the road from Yellowknife to Rae. Every time he took this road, he tried to keep count. What was he at now?

40 He thought of that song he had heard on the radio that Malcolm and Henry kept playing in their “Hour of Power” out of Yellowknife. The song went:

“Still white
nothing for miles
White curtain come down.
Kill the lights in the middle of the road and take a
take a look around.”

Morris was tempted to slam the lights off and slam the brakes, seize the engine and scrape and fly his body through the windshield, the glass-like teeth vomiting his sliced and slicing body onto the hood to kiss and rip his teeth and check apart on the beak of the eagle head ornament carved out of caribou antler.

He wanted to call out to the eagle head, “Where were you when I needed you? Where?”

Icabus gave that carving to him. It was a present from Icabus’ brother, Paul.

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

41 And him now racing from Yellowknife to Edzo racing with building supplies for his home

(Hey Hey! Whatcha Doin”?)

(Hey Hey!)

His rat-faced brother-in-law, Richard, not five inches from his face, yellow teeth, a plug of Red Man chewing tobacco packed under his lower lip, eyes slit, a black cactus of Fu Man Chu whiskers sprouting from his chin.

“Hey Hey! Whatcha Doin”?

When he pulled up at the gas station in Rae, between Edzo and Yellowknife, Richard rat-tooth ran up to his track and threw back the tarp like some crazed husband throwing the blankets back on adulterous lovers to expose Tyvek paper, doors, screws, hammer, nails, and fresh groceries for a week—all supplies for his house—all bought in Yellowknife at astounding savings with competitive prices, while Richard, the weasel brother-in-law, owned both the grocery and hardware store in Rae and was ripping off every Dogrib in town.

Here he was again with new building supplies and fresh groceries, making a midnight run from Yellowknife to Rae. Morris eyed his stash of lights, touch-up paint and sealant in the cab. All for him and his house his house his house! But Sheila—was she always this miserable? There was no end to the conspiracy! It was she who had squealed about his expeditions to Yellowknife to her brother and it was she who squealed on him that he was buying bulk in Yellowknife and it was she who sat in the track while Richard ran to the track, peeled back the orange tarp and screamed, “HEY HEY! WHATCHA DOIN’?!” in his face.

Fuck legislation. He wanted to give Richard the cobra claw and the pepper spray. He wanted to burn Richard’s eyes shut, lock his larynx shut until he passed out, drag him through the parking lot, his body a limp armless, legless, sock puppet and him, Le Champion, screaming, “Mutha Fucka got what he wanted! Mutha Fucka gon’ have me some fun!”

42 Fuck the benefits! Fuck the Red Serge!

“Go ahead, Rick ya Prick!” he wanted to scream. “You load them up in your forty thousand dollar track. You take it all back and demand a full fuckin’ cash refund. You can do it all...just give me back my wife and give me back the kid and give me the use of my prehistoric pecker!”

He remembered Sheila’s nipples and wanted to bite something. The last few times they had tried to make love, he sliced her inside with his sharp nails.

“Go easy!” she hissed and pushed him away.

He remembered her clit, how it swam to his middle finger, then disappeared, each time bringing her back hungrier and hungrier, and he refused to go down. After giving CPR to the--

the kid...

How many National Enquirers had the kid hidden in his cell under the mattresses behind the toilet asking each new guard for more—“begging them” was the term the guards stated at the inquiry—“begging them” for more reading material (more fuel for the fire)

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

Even with his tongue on fire Kevin managed to scream--

Oh Jesus oh Mary mother of god he managed to scream

(Hey Hey! Whatcha Doin”?)

“Just like a powwow dancer”

41
(Getting old, George)

Morris checked the rear view mirror. The tarp was still tied down, covering his new push broom sticking out of the tarp, its smooth handle shivering against the wind.

43

(Hey Hey! Whatcha Doin’?)

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

Sheila stayed at Richard’s now, probably nagging the hell out of him to see why my truck wasn’t in Rae or Edzo
today.

“Cuz I was in Yellowknife buying supplies and grub ya dizzy shits!” He looked around like a punched puppy, eyes
wide. “Hoo!” he yelled again. “Hey-yah!”

“Just like a powwow dancer”

Eight years in the goddammed force, Morris thought. They asked for nine chin ups at the physical. I gave ’em forty!
I didn’t mind twelve-hour shifts on Christmas. I didn’t mind twelve-hour shifts on New Years!

“Go home, Morris,” the Sarge had said. “Take some time to...”

To what, go home to my family? What family? And where’s my goddammed hard-ons, Sarge? He wanted to ask.
You never told me I’d suck mouth to mouth with a smoking kid with no eyelids and lips that tasted like hot bacon grease.

You took my--

“Go home, Morris.”

You took my dreams away.

What was that word?

After Kevin had torched himself, Morris had gone to The Gold Range in Y.K. to stop (hey hey) his shakes (whatcha
doing?). But he could feel the kid, he could see Kevin out of the corners of his bug-eyes the kid, the black crust-face with
no hair sitting next to him whispering, “Put it in... put it in your tongue in my mouth...”

No!

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

Breathing smoke eating fire his lungs splitting his tongue oh god charring his teeth--WHATTA YA THINK--

Morris had been sitting in the Gold Range Bar trying to forget. He wanted to call the Sarge and say, “Look, Sarge,
no hard-ons here but a whole lotta shakin’ going on!” when a Dogrib man stomped into the bar and stormed to the table
next to him. There were nine maybe ten Slavey and Dogrib women talking. They didn’t notice him at first as the bar was
full and the band was playing loud. Playing Van Halen’s “Why Can’t This Be Love?” The women didn’t notice him as
he stared dead center into the eyes and soul of the woman he sought. He yelled it at her, threw it at her in Dogrib: “The
Woy! The word whipped out and struck all their faces, and all of the women gasped, some of them even crossed
themselves and ran, spilling booties from their table, ran out of the bar, to the blinding light from the street.

The Dogrib man threatened in a cold and killing voice to cripple the woman if she ever tried to “touch” his sister
again.

“Dykes!” Morris chuckled. “Let them be!”

WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA--

The Dogrib man turned, straighten out his beaded moose-hide jacket and walk out into the light.

“Now what,” he turned to ask the next table over, “was that all about?” But there was no one. Everyone left out the
back door. It was only he and the woman and the band. She sat cold, mouth open, eyes up and tears snaking down her
cheeks. What was that word of banishment that blew both the Slavey and the Dogrib women from their seats? Maybe
if thrown from a single mouth and given allowance to spread its wings and claws and lash out and scoop flesh and bite
meat from eyes and throats, maybe “The Word” would come to him in a scream or dream and maybe he could scream
this word into the snow to take back his wife, bring back the kid and good god bring back his hard-ons.

The sign for Stagg River flashed by.

And this road of 67 turns—this road that was smoother in winter thanks to the DPW Caterpillars than in the
summer—talk about death!

How many Dogrib, Slavey, Inuit, White, men, women, elders, expecting mothers—
how many had died on this road?

Bracey
his uncle whispered to his father
When you hit that road from Rae to Yellowknife
you go as fast as you can
pelti to the meddl
and don’t stop for nothing
lots of people died on that road
that’s where the hitch-hikers wait
gorgeous boys with split hooves
you slow down
they’ll hop on your truck
come in your car

42
and wait

When you get home
they’ll hop on the carboo hindquarter
or your luggage
and you’ll take them into your house
they’ll bring hell to you and your family

Never look in the rearview mirror
cuz something might be lookin’ right back

My grandmother when she was alive, Morris thought
my Eh Tai
said she heard children burning on that road when she was duck hunting
she cried for them, those kids
said they should put white crosses on the side of the road
so people will remember how hungry it is

She heard shots sometimes
and children screaming as they tore through windshields
and my grandmother
my Eh Tai
she made the sign of the cross
dropped tobacco
and kept on walking

You can damn well bet, the Sarge once said
taking a long slow drag
that if those bure-o-crats in Y.K.
lived in Rae
and had to commute their government asses to Somba-ke’
they’d have that fucker paved
in no time flat

Icabus once whispered that he flew around the corner on the 41st turn and two boys were burning in their truck on
that road. He could see their hands through the flames like white wings of scared birds
flapping against the glass
throwing themselves against burning glass
a burning window
and the way it was going up
all he could do was watch
And the screaming he said
woke him up every day.

That was on the 41st turn.
41

Oh and old man Icabus
Where was he?
that long assed battle-axe
burning everything down
dancing in the flames
Where was he?

“You even know what a Dogrib looks like?” Icabus asked in the Rae Cafe.

After four years of criminology, six months at Regina, after getting his bronze medallion and his silver cross, after
getting all these "White man’s carrots" as Icabus called them. Morris returned to Rae, his mother’s soil, to kick ass and
clean up.

He had gone for a coffee before meeting the Sarge. Two Dogrib boys sat at the table next to him.
“Do you smell bacon?” one asked pushing his Dene Nation cup backwards.
“Yeah,” the other answered. “Hickory-smoked and honey-glazed.”
“Just as I thought,” the first snifed. “I smell pig.”
The coffee shop roared with laughter as Morris looked out the window and tried not to blush.
“Whooo... mom?” a voice had asked from the table over.
An elder, Icabus. Sipping coffee out of a Styrofoam cup, "I'll say it in English. Who is, your mom?"

"Nish," Morris answered. "Rosa Nish."

"Named after old Fort Rae, the island," Icabus nodded. "Been there?"

Morris shook his head.

"You're White man?"


"Piss on the Metis!" he said. "You're Dene--Dogrib."

Icabus nodded. He felt naked. He still had his pig shave from Regina.

"You even know what a Dogrib looks like?" Icabus asked. Toothless mouths exploded with laughter as elders, perched in the corner, slapped their knees and pointed.

That night the community threw a drum dance for Morris, welcoming him home as a Dene cop who had come home to help his people. They gave him a Moosehide jacket with glittering, thick beaded flower designs so pretty and so bright he blushed when the council of elders presented it to him.

Then the tea dance, where everyone held hands and danced in a circle. Fourteen Dogrib drummers bellowed prayer songs, power songs, thunder songs that lightened everyone's feet and hearts. The whole community was dancing in one circle. They called Morris in and he wore his jacket proudly, stood straighter and held his head high. When he came into the circle he held hands with Icabus who took it strongly at first, but the cement floor stole Morris's energy. His legs felt rubbery, like he was dancing on shifting sand. He tripped on Icabus's feet causing bouts of laughter from people watching. Icabus slithered his hand away and pushed him.

"Metis!" he spat. "You don't know nothing! Get away from me." Icabus stomped off to the canteen leaving him with a burning face. But he danced. Morris danced. An elder, Melanie Wah-shee, showed him how. She showed him to step on the balls of his feet and spring to his next move, to shift his weight and keep his rhythm. He spun, felt cocky, good. He looked up. Everyone was sweating, especially he, in his fresh Moosehide jacket. Melanie beside him, so beautiful, so patient.

He looked up. The ceiling was covered in sweat. That's how hot it was. It was so hot in the room, hundreds of Dogrib were so close, that the sweat was falling back down on them, bathing themselves with each other. He loved it. Hot rain.

He didn't care that Icabus was scowling at him. Melanie squeezed his hand and danced behind him, beside him, around him. He was Dogrib and so proud to be in the circle.

Morris gummed the accelerator and remembered the moose hide jacket. Where was it? When he wore it to supervise the kids playing volleyball at the Sportsplex, he wore it with pride. Old Icabus was there too, sipping tea, waiting until the kids had all left. Morris was rolling up the net, about to store it in the storage room when strong hands slapped his shoulders and spun him around.

"Take it off!" Icabus demanded. "You didn't kill that moose for its hide. You're not a hunter."

"What?" Morris tried to ask with both surprise and shock.

"You give that jacket to me and I'll decide when you can wear it," Icabus growled.

Morris obeyed. He didn't know what Icabus had over him but he gave him his jacket and had to run home through a 30 below night with wind so cold he almost froze his nose.

What ever happened to that jacket? he thought.

42-A KFC box and a two beer cans flushed by in the ditch. Then the sweat-lodges came, and everything, everything changed.

He remembered the poster at first: "SWEAT LODGE" and the dates. There were two planned in one week, one for the women, one for the men. The three Cree women who ran the sweat held a meeting with the chief and band council saying that everyone was invited—for a price.

50 bucks a head, the Sergeant grinned over coffee.

50 bucks a head.

Icabus was waiting for Morris at his house after getting off work.

Morris swore he locked his door. Icabus had let himself in and was sitting at the coffee table, legs crossed like a woman, moccasins on, jacket on, cap on, grim.

Hey, Grampy! he wanted to say. Give us a smile, Grump!

But Icabus was as cold and as meant as war.

"Sit down," Icabus ordered.

"Well, can I have some coffee?" Morris asked.

"Help yourself," Icabus said, as though Morris were the visitor. "Where's all your Indian tea?"

Morris issued the meanest look he could. "I'm all out."

The power he had over me, oh the power.

Icabus stared through him. "We have to do something."

"Oh yeah?" Morris responded, trying to maintain a firm voice like they taught at the academy. He puffed his chest out and tried to walk like the Serge, a rolling tank, ready.

"I have to burn those sweat lodges down," Icabus said. "and I need your help."

What is it with Dogrib and fire? Morris wanted to ask. He looked down at the Kentucky Fried bucket at his feet.
"What is it with the Dogrib and KFC?" Morris asked and laughed.

43

"Whoa--hold it right there," Morris wanted to say. "As an officer of the law...."

Icabus raised his hand and silenced him. "Be ready tonight," Icabus said, "around two."

Morris struggled, "But I--"

Icabus put his cup down. "See you then." He stood up, paused before the porch, and slipped his moccasins into his black rubbers.

Morris sat incredibly still after Icabus left and he was met with a warm calm.

And I need your help.

Morris stood outside of Icabus's house not knowing what to do. His watch read two a.m. A chained husky with a dead ear sniffed the air towards him. It had the black mask of a bandit. Icabus opened his door. With him he carried a huge teddy bear. It was brown, fuzzy, smiling. Was that where Icabus hid his medicine? In the belly of the bear? There was a silence as the two men gauged each other.

"My ulcer's acting up," Icabus asked. "You're ready?"

Morris nodded, trying not to laugh. Icabus almost looked human standing with that teddy bear.

"We'll take my truck. It's at my daughter's."

The dog eyed them both and wagged her tail. They walked along Fort Rae's HAP Houses. Morris noted the abundance of Ski-dos under tarps, waiting for winter and a smooth ice road passage across the Great Slave Lake. There were kids outside, playing in the dust, unattended. No wonder the elders were demanding a community curfew.

"Pah," Icabus spat, eyeing a house they passed. "That boiled owl."

"What?" Morris asked. He could see the window Icabus scoured. A screen dropped back in place.

"Maggie. She'll be on the phone now telling everyone I'm walking with you."

"What's so bad about that?"

"They'll think I'm being busted, or turning bark."

Morris laughed. It was funny how Icabus thought ten steps ahead.

"I don't know why you're laughing. Your tires will be slashed tomorrow from this gossip."

"Icabus is wise," Morris said to the sky. He was scared that people cruising by would remember them. If they did burn the sweat lodges down, the people would remember them walking together, especially Icabus and that damn teddy bear.

"Do you know how they took out the last police officer that came to Rae?"

Morris stopped. "How?"

"Dry meat."

"How?" Morris challenged.

Icabus slowed down and covered his eyes. "Last officer that was here cleaned the town up good. Too good.

Some people got together, made dry meat, gave it to the officer, Wade was his name."

Morris took a mental note, planning to verify it later with the Sergeant.

"They split the meat." "

Morris stopped. "What?"

"They dried the meat in their house, played cards. All their cigarettes smoke flew to the meat. When meat's wet, it's sticky. The smoke stuck to the meat. They found old Isadore with his mean TB. When he drinks he forgets to take his pills. They paid Isadore to split his TB onto the meat. All that shit went straight into his dry meat. They gave it to him. He ate it. He got very, very sick. How many bags have you received since arriving?"

Morris' stomach rolled. "Three."

"Do you trust who made it?"

Melanie gave him one. She smoked hers outside. The other two--How the hell did he get the other two?

Two kids approached on ten speeds.

"Do you smell dog shit?" a voice called out. It was the two boys from the coffee shop. They sped by.

"Hickory-smoked and honey-glazed," the other with the Dene Nation cap answered. "I smell pig."

They laughed before Icabus spun around and yelled, "He's your cousin!"

Both boys stopped peddalling and sailed by. Their eyes were huge.

"There's my truck," Icabus said. "You'll drive."

"WORLD'S GREATEST GRANDPA" is what the license plate said. Morris had to bite his tongue hard not to laugh.

He drove the old pick-up slowly over the bumps while Icabus used the huge teddy bear to pad his tummy from the seat belt. If anyone saw him driving, it would appear that he was the only one driving, him and that huge smiling brown bear.

Morris shook his head. Who the fuck were the Dogrib? Where did he get the other two bags of dry meat?

The smoke from Saskatchewan fires had blown north, causing the sunset to ignite like a magnesium flare. The moon, bright and still, looked like a burning dime.

"You're not locking your door?" Morris asked. There had been break-ins every day of the week this month.

"My brother, Paul Dene, would dream it first before any Dene broke into our house."

"What if they were white?"

"Bingo has strong legs. She can break her chain if she has to. We'll walk from here."

Icabus, without his teddy bear, said nothing as they walked the highway to the campground.
Morris was surprised Icabus kept pace with him but he remembered always seeing Icabus walking the road from Edzo to Rae. He had heard from children that Icabus held council with nagha in the bushmen. It was rumored that he alone mediated between the Dogrib and the nagha in matters concerning the land and medicine. Could Icabus speak their tongue? Morris wanted to reach out and touch Icabus to make sure he was real.

"A very long time ago when my hair was black," Icabus started. "I was up in Deline. You been there?"

Morris looked over his shoulder. "No."

Icabus used a soft voice. Morris was surprised that this was the same man who could be so fierce. He was also surprised that Icabus never moved his mouth when he talked. He could see the pulse of the carotid, and the vocal mechanisms at work, but Icabus’s lips never moved. "The Dene had a prophet, Ayah. Lots of inkwos."

"Inkwos?" Morris asked.

"He gave us rules, kind of like that little book you pull out of your pocket every time you’re in court or charging Suzi Smoke for bootlegging."

"Aamnways..." Morris egged him on.

"Anyways, Meets, Icabus smiled, "he warned us about sweat-lodges. He called them big beaver lodges where the two-legged were allowed to rest. He said to watch out for them, that they did not belong to us. He said they were for the other Indians down south and that we have our own ceremonies—these were in the days when you used to think a blow job was a long kiss on a windy day."

Morris laughed, surprised with Icabus’s humor. As they walked past the dam, Morris covered his nose. He could smell the rot and grunge of black garbage smoldering. On the wire fence that lined the dump, children had tied slaughtered seagulls so they looked like the birds were flying, or sitting, or diving upside down. Twenty birds at least. The only thing that gave their death away was their limp necks.

"Spooky," Morris said.

Icabus stared. Black caterpillars of burnt plastic twirled in the air, falling everywhere. Morris noticed some sand on his pull over, in his hair. The night smelled raw. Icabus sneezed.

"Where are we going?" Morris asked.

"Camp ground," Icabus said.

"How do you know the sweats are here?"

"Here these Indians braid their hair and dress in long skirts: no watches, no gold; yet they stay at Annie’s, the most expensive place in town."

"How much?"

"Over one hundred and twenty a night."

Morris shook his head. They walked and the sun bit the horizon, causing the sky to bleed dusk.

"Do you think," he asked, "that maybe the Dogrib should adapt and take sweat-lodges in?"

"Cree medicine isn’t ours, nor when money’s involved."

"They gotta pay their bills."

Icabus stopped on the road and pushed Morris.

"It’s not our way," Icabus said. "The Dogrib who have medicine are starting to ask for money as payment. The day you start involving white man’s money for Indian medicine, that’s the day it dies."

The push hadn’t been hard; it was more of a scold than anything. Morris was about to turn around and confront Icabus about his bullying when Icabus walked passed him and started to talk.

"One of my girls lives in Edmunton," Icabus continued, as if nothing had happened, "going to school to be a counselor. She said one time she was at a conference for women and that a bunch of Dogrib were going and that the people who made this meeting were having sweat-lodges. My girl started to feel funny when she saw them set up and she couldn’t sleep at night. When asked if she was going to go in, she said no. My girl said she was on her time, and they asked her if she could watch the fire outside, keep the rocks hot. She said okay."

"When those Dogrib women went in, my girl wanted to tell them to stop. She said it was like a bad dream and it looked like they were being swallowed. She said it was quiet at first but then you could hear singing and praying. She watched the fire. Then, not even fifteen minutes into it, a Dogrib woman came out vomiting. She was cold to the touch, just like she had died, my girl said. Then another, and another. They all came out vomiting. Some were crying. Others stayed sick for two days after. My girl said the organizers asked them not to tell anyone and insisted it must have been the food they had eaten. I don’t think so."

"The campground was just around the corner. Morris felt an exhilaration in hearing these stories."

"It’s not our way," Icabus continued. "When I was a kid, I watched something like a sweat-lodge. One of my cousins was sick, so sick he could hardly move. My father dug a hole in the ground where the man could lie and he made a stove out of clay. He put water in the stove and dropped red rocks into the water. Steam surrounded the man and went inside of him. We had covered the man with caribou hides over red willows. The man’s sickness came out in his sweat. We did this for two days. We prayed, gave offerings to the fire."

"That was when I learned to pray to the moon at night and pray to the sun during the day and to always pray to fire when you see it. That is our way."

"So now," Morris offered, "you and I are going to burn something that might help many people?"

"We have a direct link with the Creator. We don’t have to pay fifty bucks so he’ll listen," Icabus answered. "It all comes from inside. You watch a candle, it dies from the inside. People are like that too. They leave it to the white man;
and his pills, rather than search out for themselves what's killing them. They're too eager to trust someone else's medicine."

They were quiet. Morris thought back to the phone call he had made earlier that day.

"Sarge, tell me about Icabus."

The Sarge blew, like someone stole his breath. "Why?"

"Just noticed him around town, that's all. Wann na know the scoop."

"Best I can figure," the Sarge said (and it had sounded like he was eating something crunchy) "that man's someone who could turn the Dogrib around. Powerful, just powerful...used to drink! Boys, he'd be in the tank every night. We didn't have to mop the place for a month, and I had it for us! But one night (crunch crunch), oh it was morning, yeah I was late cuz the wife was having her cramps and I had to run her bath for her and make her tea, anyway (crunch crunch) I was late and you're only supposed to keep a drunk for no more than eight (crunch) hours and I was about two hours late.

So I come in and caught the guard sleeping. But anyway, it was Skinny Pete who was guarding Icabus that night and (crunch) he fell asleep. I peeked around the corner and Pete's little head was between his little hands and I pulled the fire alarm and he pissed his pants hopping around! I didn't know whether to laugh or holler at him."

"What if Icabus would have choked on his puke or slipped into a coma?" I yelled. "He's got the diabetes, ya know! or he used to, I dunno if he cured himself or what, but anyways, I went to let him go, to air himself out and he was gone. That little Injun was gone!" I grabbed the guard and hollered, "What the hell did you do with Icabus?"

"Pete told me he had been sleeping for only an hour and I checked the log book. It was true, Icabus was recorded as snoring away, laying in his own piss. But he was gone, Morris. I swear to God he was gone."

So I took the car, went to his house, knocked on his door and let myself in. The little Dene was having coffee. He was shaved, showered, new pants, had that cocky little smile on his face.

"You're late," was all he said. Cock-knocker!

"How the hell did you get out of the tank?" I asked. "Did you give Skinny a lickin', or what?"

"Have some coffee," he told me. Here he made a jailbreak and was offering me coffee. Your damn right I had a coffee -- and a smoke!

"Icabus," I asked, "goddam you, man! how the hell did you get out of the tank?"

"Keyhole," he said.

"Keyhole! Well we just sat there with my hair standing straight up and a squat of piss in my shorts!"

They laughed.

"You watch him," the Sarge had told him. "You watch that Indian."

Morris felt something. "You said he used to drink. Why'd he stop?"

"He killed his boy."

"What?"

"His son was a faggot, and one day told his dad. My sister-in-law translated the conversation. She was asked by his son, Jimmy, to tell Icabus he was gay. Icabus didn't know what that meant. Rita said, 'It is when a man loves another man.' Icabus covered his eyes and said, 'My only son is dead today. He died. I am alone in the world now.'""

"Jesus--"

"His boy hung himself in the city. Alone."

Morris could remember watching the orange flames storm and dance in the reflection of Icabus's eyes. It started tonight, Icabus said.

Oh they had gotten to know one another, he and Icabus. But then things started to change. Icabus was suspected of shooting someone.

What it boiled down to was Rick Wea, an out of work carver, was drinking and hunting. He saw an eagle; he shot the eagle. When he went back to Rae he had an eagle's dismembered head and two claws stuffed in a black garbage bag. Feathers and feet sold down south in a black Market and he had contacts in Yellowknife. An eagle feather could fetch hundreds of American dollars from rich New Agers. Even powwow dancers from other tribes who needed a feather from the north to complete their costumes were willing to trade trucks, rifles, money—all for a single feather.

When Rick walked up-town for coffee the next day, he was shot in both hands by a .22. Even though Rick could never carve again, charges were never pressed. It was never brought up in detachment and the Sarge told Morris to let it die down. It did. Morris heard maybe it was Rick Wea who sicked medicine on Icabus.

Maybe.

But Morris remembered the dream. He and Icabus were spending time together checking nets and camping out on the fishing islands on Great Slave Lake. Morris enjoyed sitting on pamper moss and spruce bow in the smoke house with Icabus eating fresh dry fish. Icabus was a superb cook, often sprinkling blueberries into his hanknock in the smokehouse. Icabus relaxed with the good eating and sipped tea. But after a late night of story telling and listening to the lake water lap against the island rock, Morris dreamed something horrible.

In it, Icabus was standing frozen in a room where his daughters played cards. Morris was in the room too, watching. Something was about to happen. He could feel it. He was watching Icabus try to break up the card game. It was late. Morris, in the dream, suddenly realized he was talking with Icabus's daughter, Connie. He was making progress. They were sharing a laugh and she was teasing him about his gun. She wanted to hold it and Morris was shaking his
head, smiling. She kept reaching for it, reaching for it and her knee was touching his. He could smell her hair; she was staring at his lips. She’s gonna kiss me, he thought, she wants to kiss me. Just then Icabus started screaming.

It was awful screaming. Not human. A machine screaming. A demon machine screaming. Icabus should not have been able to scream that loud at his age. But he screamed without taking a breath. The women sat scared, not knowing what to do as Morris ran towards Icabus. With his head thrown back and his fists locked to his legs Icabus screamed in horror. Morris tried to figure what was wrong. Icabus looked at the women in disbelief, only to scream even louder. He saw something in the women that scared him. Icabus looked at Morris and screamed in his face. Icabus was so scared, so childlike in his fear, it scared Morris.

"Icabus, what is it? Tell me. It’s Morris."

Then, in something more silent than words, Morris understood what was happening. What Icabus was seeing wasn’t in the room. Morris somehow understood that to Icabus, Morris appeared as something roaring toward him with rabbit teeth and a goat’s face. To Icabus, Morris had the hindquarter of a sick caribou, with cutout and pus for meat. He had the trunk and torso of a bear and the hands of a bleeding woman. The hair over his goat’s face was black and dirty, like the tail of a dead horse. Morris knew to stand still with this vision and talk his friend down. Icabus stood back. He looked old and weak, like an old chimp.

"Icabus," Morris said, "Listen to me. What you’re seeing is not real. Someone has put a curse on you. Stand still. Stay still. The women will leave. I am here. I am here for you, Icabus. Don’t be scared. On my honor, you can trust me."

"They have taken his eyes," Morris thought. He wanted to slap Icabus for being so pitiful, and hold him at the same time. Icabus looked from Morris’s eyes back to the women and started screaming again. Morris looked at the women. They were approaching, pulling their skins off. Underneath they were naked bears, peeling their mouths back, waiting to bite. Morris saw what Icabus saw. He started screaming with the old man.

Wake up! a voice told him. Wake up! This is too much. This is too strong. Wake up, Morris! The curse was spreading like a virus to him.

Morris shot awake and could still hear the metal machine of Icabus screaming. Where was he? He saw the white canvas of the tent and the tent frame around him. He could hear the waves wash up the beach. Icabus’s foamy and sleeping bag were there, but the old man was gone.

"Talking with the bushmen, I guess," Morris shivered and pulled his blankets closer. He didn’t like that idea and wondered if the bushmen could walk through the Slave, out to the islands.

Oh, Icabus, Morris asked—my teacher, my friend.

"You sure got a lot of strength," Icabus said one time, passing him a cup of tea. "But you got no power. There’s a difference."

Morris remembered the night he got off work and met Icabus coming from checking his nets. Icabus had given him a bag of white fish and Morris was pleased. They walked over to Icabus’s place only to find Connie, Icabus’s daughter, playing cards for money with three other women. The radio was blaring, the TV was on. Kids were sleeping on the floor and couch. One of the babies reeked high of shit. Another was crying. The women kept playing, even after they were broke.

Icabus yelled as he swept the cards off the table, "I told you never to play cards on the supper table. Cards are the devil’s work!"

Connie shot up and yelled, "Devil Shit!" right to his face. The women picked up the cards and the kids. They took the game elsewhere.

Icabus stood rooted to the same spot and shaking his head. Morris walked in. Icabus glanced at him. "She’s getting snaky these days."

Morris studied Icabus a moment. "Pretty good lookin’ snake."

Icabus looked at him and cracked the first smile. "You’re okay, Metis," he said. "The wolf is strong in you."

When Morris threw back his head and laughed, he realized that had been the happiest he had ever been: He had Sheila; he had the trust of Icabus; and he still had his hard-ons.

Then everything had changed. Everything.

Icabus had left for Edmonton, to be with his daughter, Augustine, while Morris was in Simmer. The coroner said it was age but Morris knew it was medicine.

Icavo.

Icabo died in some nameless mall. A stroke. A heart attack. No one knew.

A killing prayer.

Morris had been watching the phones at the detachment while Jody Black Duck went for lunch. He was trying to call Augustine in Edmonton for more information on Icabus’s death when three Cree women came in to make a complaint.

"Who’s in charge here?" the fat one asked. She looked mean and her skin was the color of dead fish-eggs.

Morris stood up. "I am."

"You’re not a Sergeant," the other one said, eying his uniform and his crotch.

"He’s in Yellowknife," Morris stated.

"You’ll do," the other smiled at him. Her eyes were so brown they were black. "We have a complaint to make."

She has mean eyes, he thought. "Okay," he said, approaching the foyer. "What happened?"

He was reaching for his pen, pulling it out of his breast pocket when he felt something.

(Hey Hey Whatcha Doin’?)
He felt cold eager fingers going through his mind, like a Rolodex. He went back to the moment with Icabus, he went back to the fire they lit. He could smell the sting of sweet sulfur as Icabus struck the match. Morris could see the hair coming out of Icabus’ ears. He could see the burnt caterpillars landing on the prayer tobacco they were laying out. Morris went back to the exact moment, the exact millisecond it all began.

He was aware he was screaming.

“He knows,” one of the women said.

“Told you,” the other agreed. “Those boys were right.”

And he came full force back to the moment.

Morris came back down into his body. He smashed back over the desk, spilling pens and paper all over the floor.

“Get the fuck outta my mind!” he screamed, “Jody—any one!”

They watched.

The sisters watched.

“—Who the fuck—how did—?”

And it happened again. He went back to when he was in his kitchen. Those cold fingers were hotter, faster, deeper. They took him back to the moment in his kitchen when he savored the words that Icabus threw: It starts tonight.

He blacked out.

When he came to, Jody and her sweet tis were hugging his face, pulling his face into her warm chest yelling,

“Constable! Wake up! What happened?”

He remembered playing possum a few seconds longer than he should have to feel her breasts pressed full into his face.

“Constable!”

That night, as he sat on the can, that’s when he felt it:

On the base of his scrotum.

At first he scratched oddly at it and then he pulled. A snake scale. He realized what was happening. “Jesus!” he screamed, “Jesus Christ, they fuckin’ know!”

44

Stars.

The stars were out like a diamond splashboard in the sky.

To his left, Morris could see the three stars of Orion’s belt.

Orion.

The hunted.

Icabus, he and Icabus—

Morris slammed his lights off and opened the door.

“WHATTA YA THINK NOW FUKKA!” he screamed to the world, rolling slow through the air, his arms raised to the world.

He looked down

“A hard-on!” he giggled, “I got a fuckin’ hard-on!”

“—No.”

Someone snapped their fingers in front of his eyes. Lightning flashed in the south.

In winter? Sheet lightning in winter?

Morris stared ahead, sipped his cold coffee and placed his cup on the dashboard. His hand was covered by a child’s hand as the wind whistled through the window.

Lizard skin.

Someone laughed in his ear.

Morris was suddenly aware of children playing in the back of his truck, peeling back his tarp, jumping on his cargo, peering in the window. With swollen burnt fingers, they pulled and pried the glass on the passenger window down.

“Hey,” Morris tried. “Hey!”

They began spilling in the cab of his truck with the cold winter air.

Morris turned, jarred awake by the heavy scent of burnt meat on the wind. A child’s charred face smiled at him while another child’s hand held his face and whispered the Word.

Morris listened, saw the black chalice of the child’s mouth open, a black tongue out.

With ice-eaten fingers, a small boy held Morris’s ears.

Morris swallowed the tongue which was colder than snow as far as he could.

Take it Just like a powwow dancer Hey, hey whatcha doin’? 45

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SOME WHERE IN TIME
by Rolland Nadjiwon

"She left."
"Yes, I know."
"Why the hell did she leave?"
"I don't know. What did she say?"
"Nothin. She didn't say nothin. She just left."
I didn't want to be around him just then. I didn't want to hear anything about what had happened. His sobbing made me feel weaker weaker than I because he was strong enough to cry. I don't know how he always managed to pull that on me but he always did. I hated him for it. I always hated him for it and I always hated myself more for hating him.

"You don't have to cry."
I wanted to be in control but he wouldn't let me. I think he detected my weakness and kept on crying. You know that kind of crying man can't do but women can. The kind that makes you put your arm around them, makes you both feel better the way they always show in movies. I thought of Clark Gable he always had his arm around someone letting them cry on his shoulder and then taking out his monogram handkerchief for them to blow their nose and dry their eyes.


I needed a diversion maybe a smoke. I always liked the way smoke so dramatically encircled such situations at least in the movies it did. I thought about Humphry Bogart and Lauren Bacal. I crooked my hat down far enough to shadow one eye and fumbled through my pockets for a cigarette. More than ever I wanted a cigarette hanging on my lip, smoke curling around my head and shoulders with dim lighting catching off the drifting smoke.

"Jeez I wish it were raining, I thought. "That's when everybody in the movies leaves. Just when it is raining, and as they get farther and farther away, it rains harder, and harder, and harder..." Ahh...no cigarettes, just candy wrappers, a stiffened tissue and some gum. Gum six months and I still wanted a cigarette. I never liked smoking anyhow. I thought it looked cool though like Marlon Brando in Rebel Without a Cause. You know, the part where he is sitting on his big old Harley Davidson with a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, the smoke just floating around in front of him like a dream.

I looked back at him. With his runny nose and eyes he reminded me of a small boy. Maybe that was how he looked after other kids on the block had beaten him up. On second thought I wanted to be nice to him. I reached into my pocket and handed him the wad of stiffened tissue I had found earlier.

Maybe I had wrapped a gum in it. Maybe the gum in it was still good. Maybe I should have kept it...
"What the hell is this...?" he said, throwing the tissue away. "Where the hell did you get that between your legs?" At least he wasn't too angry to be pissed off.

Sometimes I didn't like his crude language or sense of humor, especially when it was a put down. I felt kinda dark inside. "S-sorry," I stuttered. I really did want to help him. I just didn't know how.

I tried to think of a movie but could only think of Gilligan's Island. I didn't want that one. I would probably just have to be Gilligan. Also, I didn't like when someone else made me think of movies. I liked to think of ones I could see myself in ones that reminded me of myself. When he made me think of movies I was always the silly character like Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello. I never liked those movies. Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were ok but they weren't very romantic like. I always liked Stewart Granger in Moonfleet, something like that. Something romantic.

His crying was stopping and I was starting to feel better a bit braver too. I didn't like when he argued. I would never say anything but he would argue with me anyhow.

Arguing always reminded me of a story I read about a little boy who found a 'dark'. He penned it up in a hole in a river bank with sticks and stones and runes drawn into the sand and a rood right in front of the hole. I liked that idea. I knew that when Jesus died on his cross that cross became powerful and could be used for just about anything.

Anyhow, that dark was always angry and you could hear it arguing about everything. The little boy said he couldn't let it escape because it could get inside anything. Whatever that 'dark' got into would become angry and dangerous just like that dark. It could hurt you. That's how I felt when someone argued. I felt like there was a 'dark' inside me and inside them too. I thought about the movie The Blob. I didn't want to think about things like that.

"You want to go for a drink?" I tried hard to sound like we were in a movie.

"Sure," he said sniffing a bit and killing the effect I needed. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and wiped his nose onto his sleeve. As he stood up, in an almost graceful movement, he wiped the damp back of his hand on his pants. I thought about how I was never allowed, as a kid, to do that.

"Don't wipe your filthy hands on your clothes! What are you some kinda animal! Use a napkin. What do you think we buy them for?" I could still hear my mother or father. I always found it kind of odd since
everyone knew animals didn’t wear clothes, unless they were in a circus or on TV. And, animals certainly didn’t have hands. I saw a picture once of a bunch of dogs sitting at a table playing cards and smoking cigars.

I thought of my mother and father now and how, sometimes, we did have good times and stuff. I thought of the warmth of my mother tucking the covers around me. She would always, when she tucked me in, wind up the little music box with a carousel pony on it. And it would play Edelweiss from the movie The Sound Of Music until all my awake ran out and I would sleep warm beside that little pony. That seemed like such a long, long time ago and so, so far away.

The sun was still shining hot even though it was slanting pretty low. You could almost see to the mountains. When we lived in Mexico, we couldn’t even go out in the afternoon. We always waited until the sun was almost down and only the crimson evenings were left. I thought of Pancho Villa, he was Mexican. I thought of the movie Pancho Villa’s Gold. If we had that gold now, we wouldn’t be walking along these railroad tracks. I didn’t want to think of gold. It only made me more aware that we didn’t have any. Maybe that’s how Pancho Villa felt. If his gold was still buried up in them hills in Mexico, he didn’t get to have it either. At least, I didn’t have any gold in the first place. That almost made me feel better. I thought about in the movie where...

"Hey, shit-head..." he said. "Where the hell is this stash you got hidden? We gotta fuckin walk all the way to the fuckin mountains?"

"S-s-sorry..." I said. "It ain’t much farther. Really. S-s-sorry..." He always said that every time we came out here. And I always said "S-s-sorry." It gave him something I didn’t understand, but that was ok.

"Forget it." he said. "What’s a buddy for anyway." He moved closer and put his arm around my shoulders. I could see the spot on his hand where his tears and mucus had dried to a crust. It was too close to my face. I didn’t think I wanted him touching me. I didn’t want to push his arm off and make him mad either. I didn’t want to be alone either. I just didn’t want to be touched especially not by him.

I looked over at the barbed wire fence where someone had hung a dead coyote. I thought about Australia. I had seen a movie once where their version of cowboys ride around shooting Dingo dogs and hanging their bodies on the fences. They have high fences miles and miles long to keep the kangaroos and other wildlife out of their farmlands. If that don’t work they just shoot them all and hang their bodies on the fences. Some of the animals they skin first for the hides, like the kangaroo and deer, then they hang their stripped carcasses on the fence. Its so hot and dry they don’t rot, they just shrivel up and dry out. I didn’t like that picture of Australia as much as I did when I went to see The Man From Snowy River. Now that is how Australia is supposed to happen with mates, and brambles, and the man saving the woman more like real life.

We walked toward the tool shack on the side of the tracks near the fence. "I’ll go and get the stuff." I said, and headed off toward the sagebrushes. I could smell the sage drifting across the early evening. It smelled good. It smelled familiar. I thought of Riders Of The Purple Sage.

"I’ll get the water," he said.

There was a little stream behind the section shed down in the arroyo. I liked to go and sit there sometimes. There were big old cottonwood trees there. You couldn’t see them from the tracks or the shed. You had to walk over to the edge of the wash and a whole different world opened up before your eyes. One with grass and a stream and trees and sometimes there were pronghorns there even little rabbits hopping around and eating the grass. They always made me think of Steinbeck’s movie Of Mice And Men. You know, at the end there where they go and sit under the big old cottonwood trees and they talk about rabbits and a farm and a garden and while they are talking about all these beautiful thoughts his friend shoots him in the back of the head.

"Yes! Where the fuck are yah. What the hell yah doin' drinking it all yourself?"

"Coming, coming. S-s-sorry."

I snagged up the two bottles of rubbing alcohol and three cans of Lysol we had stashed the first time we came back from town. A mouse or squirrel had eaten a hole in one of the loaves of bread. Must have been hungry. It probably lived down in that arroyo too with those pronghorns and all those little rabbits.

"Jeez, I needed so piss but I didn’t want to make him mad again. I could feel the warm trickling down the inside of my pants leg. It was ok. Sometimes I liked that kind of awareness. I would just go down to the stream later and wash when I had time. Maybe he would stagger back to town. I would be alone then. Probably all night. I didn’t like to be alone but sometimes it was ok. Sometimes I could take those little alone pieces of time and hold onto them. I would put them all together when I needed them, like a quilt, and I would have a bigger time. One big enough to hold all of me. I would go into that time and there it wouldn’t matter if I was alone or not.
A SON FOR MEMPHIS
by Briar Grace-Smith

The King smoothed his white studded trouser suit, folded and bounced his hair into a puff on top and stroked his fuzzy black sideburns as if they were the inside of somebody’s thigh. Like a well oiled snake he slid into his studded white trouser suit, stretched his feet into the white vinyl boots, fastened the clasp on his cape, thrust his pelvis forward and struck a pose like lighting. It was true. He was the one and only. King.

"Hey Moses," it was Mere. Sliding that name "Moses" under the door like a piece of wet pornography.

"Moses, are you gonna be long in there? I haven’t had a shower yet. Moses? Moses?"

"Like everyone else in town she’d stopped calling him King and started calling him that name... Moses, after the lady who claimed that she was his mother had come to stay. Bold and bright the mother impersonator had stepped inside with that name scrunched into a ball, hidden and tucked into the sleeve of her cardigan. Then suddenly, purposefully she’d pulled it out and started flinging it around. Sending spring showers of the name raining down over furniture and food.

Poisoning plant life.

She was a demented magician and the name was a contagious virus she had let loose on the world. He had to stop it spreading.

"Mere, if you’re still out there, then listen hard baby! he drewled defiantly. Filling the moment with the authenticity of his Kingliness.

"My name is Elvis. Elvis Aaron Presley, if you don’t like that you can call me King, Little Lady."

"I can’t be bothered with this shit Moses, it’s not funny ‘any more...it...you’re sick. I’m going to Clare’s to have my shower. See you at the gig and remember Moses, it’s a fund-raiser for my netball club. I had to push really hard to get you on the bill so don’t go blowing it.”

"Moses!" the door slammed after her.

The King sat on the pink throne of the toilet feeling his blood turn to lead and sink to his feet.

Even the one he loved the most now doubted him.

Slow and heavy he slid off the seat and crumpled onto his knees. With his palms stuck together in prayer, he raised his eyes roofwards to where the blue eyed face of Jesus shimmered down at him. Reflected in its pool of pink tiles.

"Sweet Jesus, I am like you were, armed with nothing but truth and goodness of intention and have been persecuted with the bullets of suspicion and mistrust. But now I grow weary. How many times must I travel this road before it leads me back to Memphis?"

Over the street little Heremana James stood on a chair picking the grapes which hung, dark bunches of sheep turds over the verandah. He picked and ate the sour grapes with such relish and high drama that to anyone watching it would seem that nothing else mattered. As if there was no war or famine, no new Prime Ministers. Like Princess Di had never loved Dodi. The grapes and the small boy picking them were the be all and end all of the world. For Heremana James had a way of doing things that made even the most mundane of events seem like they belonged in a movie and to all of those around him, his parents and his grandparents, Heremana was a very special little boy. He was the sun and they were his moons. He was the centre of their universe, the sole apple on their tree, the only bunch of grapes on their vine. A single child in a family growing old.

Sturdy and strong they stood behind their son, protecting him from the Southerly in case it snapped his back and from the hard rains for fear they would strip the shimmering skin of innocence that still covered his eight year old body. A child, they believed, should be allowed to remain a child. To all those who knew him young Heremana was an open book, a boy who’d answer any question, who’d give an on going commentary of what was happening in his life at any time.

"Look Mum, a caterpillar I like caterpillars but orange is my favorite colour when I grow up I’m going to work at the zoo in the butterfly cage did you get any peanut butter did you know that Tasha made Sam cry and Jury’s gonna marry Xena warrior Princess?"

Heremana’s parents thought any secrets their son gathered fell out of his mouth as soon as he snapped them up, and the pair of them listened and remembered these secrets so when family stopped by they could pass them round like a packet of arrowmint chewing gum. But there was one secret Heremana had which he’d never spoken out loud, that wasn’t meant for sharing. He thought about it all the time, even when he was helping his Dad pull up spuds and when he was eating sour grapes off the verandah. It was so potent that since he’d drunken it in the neat braids of hair which sat relaxed against his chest had turned a bluer shade of black and started to curl at the ends.

The man who lived over the road was Elvis Presley. Not a wanna-be crazy Elvis like everyone in Kanaka thought but the real thing. Coca-cola in a glass bottle. Heremana knew this because the man never took a minute off being Elvis. He talked like Elvis when he was putting his corgi and even mowed the lawns in studs, sequins and stretch. The man had confirmed Heremana’s thoughts by one day popping his head up on the hedge while the boy was playing on the front lawn. It’d sat there for a minute amongst the smelly white hedge flowers. Watching. Then 'Hello there son,
it said. "My name is Elvis Aaron Presley. You believe that don’t ya now?" After waiting for an answer but getting nothing but round and blinging possum eyes the man had sighed with an accent, removed his head from the hedges and bobbed across the road with it.

"I believe you," Heremaia had whispered after the retreating figure.

The man never heard Heremaia’s response but it flew like a lasso from the boy’s mouth across the street and wrapped itself into a tight knot around the rhinestones in his belt buckle. Binding the pair together. And now under the vines his cheeks bulging with roundness, his chin plastered with purple, Heremaia felt his skin stretch. Smooth and thin as the grapes he was eating. Bursting with secret.

Junk food was the King’s only master. It went straight to his brain like heroin and after replacing the lead in his blood with six chocolate sundaes he felt much lighter. He even managed another twist of his cape as he thrust his way outside to his waiting car.

Snatching a few lines from his famous song I'm all shook up on his way.

"Holy hell, I miss my Chevrolet," he grinned as the Mini backfired and missed 2 beats. He remembered the way it used to be when he'd first arrived in Kanuka Village. Old St. Johns hall used to literally rock on its piles to the refrains of "Hounddog" and "Blue Suede Shoes". People traveling along the motorway to the clubs and bars of Wellington on a Friday night would hear the commotion and turn off into Kanuka to see what all the fuss was about. Once there they would stay and dance. Some never went home and nine months after his first gig the town was brimming with new born babies. All Scorpio’s. There were more pregnancies that year than in the fifties when a thousand American soldiers poured into the village and set up camp.

Waiting for a war that never happened.

Yes. He was the man. Everyday he'd wiggle his almighty pelvis Dawn, Mere, Rata and a whole lot of other nice ladies would scream and clap. During his first gig he'd thrown Mere his scarf and later she’d told him how she used to tie it on her pillow so she could smell him while she slept.

Those were the days when her eyes were glazed over with love. When she never said no. When she’d called him King and believed it. She’d been his baby doll and he’d loved her as much as his sugar coated Priscilla, even dared to imagine that one day they’d have a little princess as sweet as his darlin’ Lisa-Marie. He’d dress her in candy pink frills and fed her chocolate hearts for breakfast. In those days the village had meant as much to him as Memphis, Tennessee. Now she and Kanuka had joined forces and turned against him.

Aah yes. This was a country full of hard woman and hard towns. Killing him with karaoke and Jukebox, drowning him out with rap, funk and loud irrelevant conversation, destroying him with the erratic style of their dance. Yet inside the soles of the King's blue suede shoes, a dusting of hope still itched between his toes. Causing him to dream that tonight would be different, that tonight he would once more be the most wanted man in Kanuka.

Nobody noticed the King stride into St. Johns, cape riding the air behind him like a magic carpet. The sea didn’t part and no one fainted or threw their underwear. The crowd just kept talking, drinking and laughing. But not for long, with a wave of his cape and a sprinkle of magic he'd soon remind them that this wasn't just another night at the TAB. The King had already done the sound check and set up earlier that day. He was ready now to take on the mic. He raised an eyebrow to Mere’s cousin Bob who was backing him up on bass guitar. Bob nodded his head sighed and turned up. The mic throbbed in the King's hand and he gave it a quick dip and tango just to see if it was gonna handle some of the moves he had planned for tonight.

It was a willing and dexterous partner.

"Aah good evening everybody," he crooned, his drawl mired with feedback. There was no response, people just kept doing the same old things and tapping their feet to the sweet tones of some newly famous funk songstress coming from a stereo. So the King snapped his fingers and struck a pose. Bob winced. "The King is dead and buried at Graceland," he said without moving his lips.

Nobody else noticed that pose thank god except Mere who glided her way across the hall and turned off the tape that was playing. A move that had the same effect as throwing petrol onto sweetly smoldering embers. Heads turned, arms folded knees locked and the village of Kanuka glared at the King like an army of venom spitting black adders.

"Aah good evening everybody, it's my great pleasure to be with you all on this wonderful night" "Jesus Christ, not Moses again!" yelled Toa the butcher, bashing the wall with bloodstained hands. "You told us Bic Runga was coming."

"She is, but her plane's late", Mere's voice was shrill and defensive. "Moses is here just to fill in the gap, so shut it". Fill the gap thought the King, that's all he was now. Polyfiller. A hole stuffer. A piece of dry toast before the roast dinner. Ricky Green, the black sheep of Jimmy Green’s bad family kicked a chair and satanically mumbled something suspicious from his hood covered face. The crowd nodded their heads in agreement. Things were starting to look bad.

"Didn't you lot read the fine print of your tickets?" Mere to the rescue again. "If you all look carefully beneath Bic Runga's name it says support act Moses Brown".

"Hell," roared Toa the butcher. "You'd need a frigging microscope to read that".

"Tough!" shrieked Mere. "Tough, Moses is here and you all know he puts a lot of effort into
pretending to be Elvis Presley*.

"Do not forsake me oh my darlin." The King’s voice blared through the speakers causing Mere to shrink like a mushroom. The bloody idiot was really pushing it tonight. "He’s not worth than a peanut slab," came an anonymous wail from the blackness of the kitchen.

Maybe it was it was the ghost of St. Johns. Everybody knew the place was haunted by some angry Priest. Spines tingled, teeth chattered, hairs stood on end and the hall was silent for twenty seconds while they all thought about the dead man.

The ghost the ghost the ghost.

Then Sally Fendleton emerged from the kitchen a glass of water in hand and burped. "What are you all staring at?" she asked.

The King knew he had to make them understand. So again he took the mic. "Good Evening Kanaka home of the great Norfolk Pine, might I say again what a pleasure it is to see you all tonight. Bless ya all each and every one of ya."

There was a round of mumbling like the beginning of an earthquake.

The polyester lining of the King’s suit squeaked with moisture. Things were heating up. "Please everybody, listen to me when I say I am Elvis Aaron Presley. The one and only King. Who am I? Who am I? Let me hear it!" The King held out his mic. It floated above them all like a bone to a pack of starved Pitbulls. Waiting for a bite.

Bob the bass player leapt from the stage. He’d had enough and was going home to watch the lotto results. There was a clatter, a moving of chairs, a stamping of feet. Those who weren’t standing stood, those who were standing leap the way. The crowd rolled forward. A giant tsunami ready to swallow King in one angry slurp.

"Run for Moses, out the stage exit!" shouted Mere.

"No way baby. The King doesn’t run for any man. I will die in the name of truth". And Mere wondered how she could’ve possibly slept with such a lunatic. The King shut his eyes and spread his arms and legs wide in preparation for the crucifixion.

"Hey you fullas look who’s here, it’s Bic," someone yelled as quickly as the tsunami came in it went out again washing gently all over a dazed Bic Runga. But it wasn’t really Bic Runga, it was Ricky Green’s (the black sheep of Billy Green’s bad family) Parole Officer who had a similar hair style. But no one cared, least of all her. She smiled, chatted and signed cd covers like she was born for it.

The King stood like a solitary comet on an empty stage watching them all forget him. This had to be worse than the cruellest of crucifixions.

Mere stepped up beside him and gently pushed his arms down. With the tips of her fingers she scraped his sideboards as if she were buffing her nails.

"Moses. Please get some help".

He gave her strained face one last look, another snapshot for an album now overflowing with memories of lives and loves lost. He had nothing left to say to her but

"Take care of yourself little lady and remember the good times."

The outside air filled the King’s lungs and sharpened his thoughts. There was no use dwelling on the short sightedness of others. He had to move on. It was time. He’d leave Mere the car, his shoes would carry him now, he’d follow the coastline until the god lord told him it was time to stop. He’d been walking for an hour, following the moon along the whispering beach before he heard a small but purposeful cough, someone clearing their throat, wanting to be heard. Wanting to be seen. The King turned, behind him stood a little warrior braids swinging, brave and determined. Baptised in moonlight.

And he knew a warrior when he saw one. After all he was part Cherokee Indian himself.

"Who are you son?" he asked.

"I am Heremaia, Heremaia James," said the warrior boy.

Stars and phosphorus danced and fish played in the ocean to the sound of his voice.

"That’s a mighty strong name son." 

"And I know who you are, Elvis Aaron Presley otherwise known as the King. You told me and I believe you, but my mum and dad don’t."

The King knelted in the cold sand beside the warrior’s feet.

His body heaved and shook so relieved was it to finally have a friend. The warrior stood proud and stoic above him. Looking down and frowning. Then finally tapping the King on his shoulder. "Don’t do that, its gonna be all right, you’ll be kei te pai. I’ll come with you if you want". Hearing this, the moon and stars retreated, the sea grew cold and the fish hid in holes.

The warmth from the man’s hand spread and filled the boy’s small body as they walked together along the beach. He was growing tired now but pleased still to be walking with his secret and trying, trying hard not to remember Mum not to think about Dad, or his grandparents, and how scared they would be to find him gone. It’d be okay, he wasn’t lost, this was just for a little while, and behind him he’d left a wiggling trail of gold flecked tracks which they could follow in the morning. But the child knew the shore, it was a place where things left behind were quickly stolen, footprints and shells were taken by the waves as soon as they were dropped and remembering this his eight year old skin of innocence began to flake and peel.

The man tightened his grip around the boy’s hand and smiled now, happy and proud to have at last found a Disciple.

One who would always believe.
A son to take home to Memphis.
TWO POEMS
by Kimberly Blaeser

letter, from one half mad writer to another
for Lorne Simon

Poets, you said
eating watermelon
that hot July in Norman
peel off old skins.

My mouth
cracked at the corners
and layers
dropped away with each word.

Nothing, you said
as you left
for summer travel
ever decays
for the Poet.

One stray image stays:
The gallery yard filled
gnats and 500 Nations.
And that tree
where we leaned
laughing in shadows,
in shadows
dusk handsome bark
becomes Micmac.

Only the skin, you said
in your letters
from B.C.
of things decays.

Only the skin
I repeat to myself
as I trace your name
in an ink scrawl,
your presence in a signature.

Poems, you wrote,
draw memory
like moon power
pulls on the seas
and creates tides.

Now your voice calls back
pulls from Skedeg'moochv-ooti,
the Road of the Spirits,
the Milky Way.
Words scattered like breadcrumbs
to find our way from madness home.

Moon soft rhythms,
The Poet's voice, I say,
drawing water
on a journey of memory
where two half mad writers
become one.
And tide rises
and tide falls away.

This Guy Back Home
Always the last fish house
left on the lake.
Day he pulls it out
the ice breaks up.
He's that kind.
The one all the old ladies want
to take to bingo
and not just for his luck.
He's the guy
can make everyone laugh
can sing Indian songs,
can wear his hair long
growing
as he shadow boxes
the county sheriff.
Watch that one...
my uncle says,
and I say Yesss.
UNTITLED #1
by Viktor Allen

My brother Ricky was a nephew of Bob Marley. To my bro he was Uncle Bob because of the close relationship he had with the Kaya album. He loved the cover of that album just as much as he loved the music. Ricky thought that Uncle Bob would have made it even without those pesky Wailers.

"He should come here and sing with me!" Ricky would yell over the top of Uncle Bob pleading about how much he didn’t wanna wait in vain for anyone’s love.

"I’m all the Wailer Uncle Bob needs," my brother would say, slow grooving to "One Drop". My bro saw it as a way of empathising with all our brothers and sisters spread out in the African Diaspora.

My brother would dance in his bedroom, kicking his skinny legs high up in the air like those black people on TV ONE News laying it down to those Afrikander Policemen with the guns. He especially liked kicking it up to "Could you be loved".

But when Uncle Bob let the rhythm sway to a cool breeze like "Stir it up", then little darlin’, Ricky would throw his head forward, eyes tightly closed and let his arms dangle and sway.

This rhythm would sway until either he was too exhausted to dance and would collapse. Or my mother would yank the cord from my brother’s Sanyo tape recorder. That was usually around 9.30 Sunday night when there was nothing better to watch on TV, and my mother was getting over her hangover from the week. Sunday nights was the time she would sit on the floor with a cup of tea and her tobacco, and strip and prepare flax for weaving kete karakake. Small flax baskets.

My brother would turn off the tape recorder. But not reluctantly. He would sit down beside Mum and help her with the flax. I used to think it was because he wanted to scab some tobacco off her. Eventually I came to realise it was much more. It was like Uncle Bob was getting through to Ricky on a deeper, almost existential level. Like he was whispering to my brother, “Satisfy my soul...satisfy my soul...”

Even though my Mum didn’t say it, I know she enjoyed those times with her eldest son. And even though she used to moan and groan about that ‘jungle music’ Ricky listened to, deep down I think she was grateful to Uncle Bob for giving her a few more years to be with her eldest boy. She was cool like that our Mum.

My brother would try to talk to Mum. But it was hard you know? Mum could speak fluent Maori and she was taught Oxford English at Boarding school. Ricky on the other hand was proficient at Kiwi English (where every second word was an elongated ‘masate’) and Cheh? Maori English (where every second word was, yep you guessed it, Cheh?). But he was also boozing up on his knowledge of Rasta-speak (where phrases like ‘Hey Mon’, ‘Eyeeeye Mon’, ‘Me wan fi goh rave’ and ‘If deh caap fit, wear it’ were liberally sprinkled throughout sentences.)

On that basis communication never looked promising. A typical conversation between my Mum and Ricky would go something like this:

"I understand you have been absent from school recently."

"Me wan fi goh rave, Cheh?"

"Your teacher sent this note home today. He aha tenei? What is this? I would like to know the meaning of this please."

"Oh man. Me done nuthin’ to those fullahs. Cheh?"

"He titiro me whakarongo! Look and listen! What are you doing to yourself? Do you want to be a success or not? Why can’t you be like your cousins?"

"Cheh, dis eyeeeye mon. No sweat Ma. Can pass the test standing on my head."

"You can fail your exams standing on your feet."

"Hey Ma, if deh caap fit, wear it. Cheh."

And on and on this would continue until both couldn’t figure out what to say anymore. Or at least until all the flax was woven into kete. Then my brother would lepe down to the bedroom. He would grab his Kaya album cover and place it reverently under his pillow, beside my Grandmother’s Paipera Tapu. He’d rub his hands over the thick leather cover of my Nan’s Bible, lie back and float on.

My mother would stay up, prodding the burning logs in the fire with a heavy steel bar. She’d gather the remaining wisps of flax into a ball and put it into a basket. Like a baby being placed in a crib. Sometimes I could feel her reading the blue fire flames in the crackling wood.

Sometimes I’d hear the TV click on to the ghastly metal of Led Zep on ‘Radio with Pictures’.

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Strangely, my brother’s favorite Uncle Bob song was not from the Kaya album. To be sure, Ricky thought Uncle Bob’s mantra of revolution was cool. But no. Ricky liked nothing more than to shove an old tape into the tape recorder, kick back and listen to the simple melody of Sun is shining.

Sun is shining begins with the sound of an old organ wheezing out at a typical slow Reggae rhythm. A heavy bass is a pre-requisite on Uncle Bob songs too. You gotta play tight. Everyone in the Reggae world
abides by that golden rule. Even with Pacific Reggae
down here.

Then Uncle Bob’s voice crackles over the
speakers. (For a long time I was never sure whether the
crackle was deliberate on behalf of Uncle Bob or if it
was just the tape recorder. Not until I was older and
heard Sun is shining in Dolby stereo was I able to
discover the truth. But that’s another story.)

“Sun is shining. Weather is sweet yeah. Make
you wanna move. Your dancing feet yeah.”

Uncle Bob was the expert of the slow nonchalant
drawl. On other songs of his, like Get up,
Stand up and Coming in from the cold, Uncle Bob
would cleverly intersperse the slow drawl with a
staccato rhythmic quality. But on Sun is shining he
would always show his hand. And it was always a slow
hand.

My brother recognised that hand. Ricky was
always slow and deliberate with his actions and
movement. Once we were watching the TV that
belonged to Mum’s husband. He hated us watching “his
TV” even though it and he lived in our house. But
Ricky loved these occasions. They were made for him.
He would come home at precisely 5.28 pm Monday
to Friday. (No one cared what time he left in the
mornings. Only the TV ONE test pattern was on that
early.) Ricky would wait until he heard the click of the
van door opening. Then he would meander into the
living room and caress the TV switch to Battlesstar
Galactica.

The kitchen door would creak just as the
opening credits wandered on screen with a voiceover
speculating about tribes of humans somewhere in
the universe trying to find Planet Terra. Ricky would lay
back on the old geezer’s favourite chair, hands behind
his back, watching Apollo and Starbuck Going Hard
over the Cylons. It was always at this stage I would
hear my brother ever utter the old geezer’s name.
Apparently it was a really long Maori name that
belonged to one of his ancestors. A name that carried
Bulk Mana. But it had been shortened to three letters
and two syllables.

My brother would turn untainted to my
stepfather. He would smile wanly at him.

“Hiya Au.” Then he would glance back to
Starbuck. But in keeping with the spirit of space
exploration ala Battlesstar Galactica and in paying
homage to the android heroes of the Star Wars
tradition, my brother would mutter under his breath a
split nanosecond after offering his greetings:

“Dee Two”.

I guess maybe Ricky saw our stepfather as
being a Cylon who he needed to Go Hard over.
Whatever it was, there was nothing subtle about our
stepfather’s reaction. He stomped out the door swearing
cursing under his breath. Shuffled movement on the
roof. The TV suddenly lurches backwards along the
coffee table. Like having a heart attack perhaps. Words
stumbled out of my mouth, “He’s cutting the aerial cord
again.” And Starbuck and Apollo were gone, their ship
lost in a haze of white noise. But the Cylon was
breathing heavily from above.

Times like this, Ricky forgot Uncle Bob’s
teachings. He grabbed and slammed a tape into his
recorder. Cranked it up until the speakers vibrated. And
he swung, almost fell out the living room window,
gyrating his body on the window sill. Times like this
Ricky would yell, sing and laugh while simultaneously
rolling his eyes back and around in his head to the
militancy of another late and Great, Prince Fari; “We
gonna ruff it down there, (Murderah)

We gonna ruff it and tuff it down there
(Murderah)

Brujo Man a Warrior Man,
Brujo Man a Warrior Man... wooooo0000000
yeah!!”

I was never sure what the Cylon would do on
occasions like this. I mean what can you do when you
have a shortcircuiting Cylon on your roof? But my
brother knew exactly what to do. Like one of those
Freedom Fighters in Bougainville, or those Kanaky
people kicking Gendarme arse, Ricky would snipe away
at the alien who dared to invade our territory.

Looking back now, I think it was a time of
earthmoving, catalytic proportions for my brother.
Events like this happened frequently. And like a chain
reaction, they set in motion the life spirial my brother
would run, walk and jump on for the rest of his life.

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‘Oh to the rescue. Here I am. Want you to
know all. Here I stand. Oh oh oh oh oh...”

Ricky always sang this part of “Sun is shining”
extra softly. He would say to me,

“Uncle’s thoughts carry Bulk Mana here leedle
bro... Uncle Bob is our Protector. We’re gonna rock
with him all the way. State of it. Cheh!! “

That’s how conversations with Ricky were you
know? He never talked much.

When he did his words and thoughts were
always intense. Unlike people who spoke in whispers,
Ricky’s words always matched his thoughts. And when
you added them up, they always equalled the sum total
of his deeds.

For instance when Ricky said he was going to
help with the kaimahi at a Tangi, everyone knew to
expect the smell of freshly smoked eel wafting through
the Wharekai kitchens. Enough to feed everyone over
the whole three days we would gather to say ka kite
ano to a loved one.

What about when Uncle Tai wanted Ricky to
go pick up his girlfriend? She was the same age as
Ricky. Which meant she was 20 years younger than
Uncle Tai. It didn’t fool anyone. People gathered in the
Pub and at the game and the beach and asked, “What’s
the point dragging his nephew along with him? Geez,
poor Ricki has to sit in the back of the car. Where does Girl sit? In the front next to the old geezer. Old coot thinks he’s Elvis reincarnate on the Mane.

But Ricky didn’t mind. He was always pleased to oblige. Uncle Tai wouldn’t mind. Uncle Tai was always pleased to oblige. Uncle Tai would poke him in the ribs and grin like an old labrador, his green bellbottom slacks and black Pointer Sister shoes making him look like a hustler off Hill Street Blues. In Aotearoa. Uncle Tai would pat his hair down and cackle wickedly. "Just to make it look good. You know how it is eh boy?"

But the most vivid memory I have is of Dad died. Drunk men stalked our Mum.

Early morning phone calls. Car headlights shining up our drive at 3 am. Our Mum had it all. Mortgage-free house in her name. A burgeoning floristry business. Two cars and insurance money to burn. She was a prime target. They gathered around her like ants around the Golden Syrup jar left out overnight.

At eighteen, My brother was still caught in that shadowy boundary line separating a boy from becoming a man. But he could compensate, no worries. Plus he was big. So when Barney Rakura decided to swoop around our place at 3:37 am Saturday my brother was prepared.

Only me and my two older sisters were home. We peered through the bedroom curtains and watched Barney’s twin shadows scrunching along the scoria push into the garage that doubled for my Mum’s florist studio.

We heard Barney pick up the phone in the garage when my sister hurriedly made a call to our cousins down the road. His heavy breathing didn’t scare my sister. It just pissed her off. So when the kitchen door burst open and Ricky came running through from godknowwhere he was greeted with a softball bat right smack bang in the middle of his face.

A broken nose didn’t deter my brother though. He stumbled out the door after my sister who had decided to hit a home run on any other dude who got in her way. With blood streaming down his face Ricki grabbed the axe and started yelling into the backlawn dark.

My sister told him to shut up. "The bastard’s gone," muttered my sister, "And where the fuck were you when we needed you? Never mind. Just shut up and help me."

And my sister and my brother proceeded to tear apart Barney Rakura’s Ford Cortina he left in the drive after beating a hasty retreat.

I recall pulling away the bedroom curtains to reveal my brother and sister, and some of my cousins framed in the window. They were sitting on Barney’s stripped car. Cooze was swinging some wiring in the air. Purds was flinging the hubcaps around like frisbees and Barry Horse was struggling to put the steering wheel he had ripped off around his neck. But my brother and sister stood on the car roof. They were laughing at my brother’s nose job and jostling over who had the right to stand on the roof.

I couldn’t see my brother’s eyes. But I know what he was feeling. Happiness is having a sister who takes no shit. And doesn’t ride front seat of any bastard’s wheels.

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"As the morning gathers the rainbow. I want you to know, I’m a rainbow too."

My brother never had a favorite saying. Mainly cos he was too busy trying to work out in his head what not to say. When he used to hang out with his mates and cuzzies he was a certain kind of Ricky. The Ricky who liked to play Santana solos on his Ibanez twelve string at the beach. The kind of dude who would stumble out of the Waitangi Pub straight into the harbour. And amazingly wouldn’t drown. The bro who would get so drunk he would saunter up to gang members in the Waitangi Pub and ask if they would like to dance with him. To Le Chic’s Freak out! (One time his mouth got the better of him and he was sucking on popsicles for a week to reduce the swelling. But that’s another story.)

But when all was quiet at home my brother would remove himself and head to his bedroom. Behind the door you could hear the muffled picking of guitar strings and my brother’s voice suitably anemic to Uncle Bob’s classic, No Woman No Cry:

I remember when we used to sit,
in a government yard in Trenchtown,
And then Georgie, would make the fire light,
As it was, love would burn into the night,
And we would cook wholemeal porridge,
Of which I’d share with you.

My fear, is my only courage.
So I got to push on thru,
but while I’m gone I say,
Everything’s gonna be alright now.
Everything’s gonna be alright,
No Woman No Cry...

But next time my brother walked out of his bedroom he didn’t shoot to the Pub. Instead he stood to extra special attention as the Hikoi walked through town and into his life.

My brother stood outside Birdman’s electrical shop cracking jokes with Purds and Cooze, eating potato chips when they heard Auntie Katraina and Mum calling out the karanga to the Hikoi.

At first all Ricky saw was a large amorphous mass moving towards him.

Mum and Auntie Katraina were dressed in their Church clothes. (They also doubled as their Māori clothes too.) The keening waiting voice of Auntie Katraina cut through the stillness quietly meandering through town. The mass moved forward. Getting close. Individuality realising itself. Old men with 28 Maori Battalion badges on their dark blazers. Young afroed
and dreadlocked males with jeans, checkered swandris and white AFFCO rubber gumboots.

Some had children on their shoulders, while young mothers laughed with old women and led from the front. A female voice cried out from the Hiki. The reply to Auntie Kataraina. Ricky guessed the voice was young. His age. My brother frantically looked for that voice.

My brother never found the voice that day. He found her though. There she was. On her own. In the front. The Old Woman who led the Hiki from the top of the Island. At Te Reenga Wairua. The place where the spirits leap off the cliff, having lived well in this life. To leave forever. Where our Dad leaped.

Ricky leaped too. Right into the crowd marching behind the Old Woman. Laughter and mirth greeted him.

"Kia ora cu! Haere mai! About bloody time bro! You’re gonna need more than jandals for this hiki! Hahahaha!"

Purds and Cooze looked confused. But they shrugged their shoulders and jumped in too. The three newcomers could sense order now. What seemed chaotic from outside was a perfect dynamic within. Old people and children marched in the middle, while the young and fit formed a fluid phalanx around the epicentre. Like a shield to protect the weak. They could touch the lifespiral being generated. And feel the warm welcome envelop their being.

Ricky smiled at his cousins and glanced up front towards the back of the hunched figure leading the procession. She was wearing a long black skirt, a red cardigan and a dark blanket draped over her head. She doesn’t need a shield thought Ricky. Cos she’s the sword.

An old man handed Ricky a large banner. It read. "NOT ONE MORE ACRE OF MAORI LAND" "Here," said the old man, wheezing softly, "Long walk eh boy? Go forever. I’m up to it. How ’bout you?”. Ricky grabbed the old man’s hand and smiled.

"State of it eh Matai? No worries. Let’s rock on down.

The old man laughed and thrust a five dollar bill into Ricky’s hand. "Here go buy me some tobacco at that shop over there eh. Pocket Edition. Don’t forget to grab some papers too And take that with you." The old man pointed to the banner. "Everyone needs waking up around here eh?" And he laughed big and huge.

***

A while back I heard he was in Ahipara. In Te Aupouri land. Working for the local Maori Radio station, deejaying the Waahi Tapu show, at the graveyard times of midnight to whenever the sun rose.

I went to Uncle Bob’s one and only legendary concert at Western Springs in Auckland. I expected to have a great time. I walked out dejected and dejected. My brother was nowhere to be seen. I still have the old tape of Uncle Bob’s Sun is shining. But I never listen to it.

You see, thinking about it, I know what was happening to my brother. Uncle Bob had left him. Or more to the point Ricky had left Uncle Bob. My brother needed to find another rhythm. Another right bassline to dance to. I like to think my brother is out there now, working on his tempo.

Slow or fast. Roots Radics Rockers. No worries. I know whatever happens, my brother’s lifespiral remains fundamentally constant. He will always make sure to catch a few rays of sun when the rhythm carries him.

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STRAY BULLETS
(oka Re/Vision)
by Kateri Akwenzie Damm

my touch is a history book
full of lies and half-forgotten truths
written by others
who hold the pens
and power

my heart is a stray bullet
ricocheting in an empty room

my head was sold
for the first shiny trinket
offered

my beliefs were bought cheap
like magic potions at a travelling road show
with promises
everyone wants to believe
but only a fool invests in

my name was stolen
by bandits in black robes
my world was taken
for a putting green

From: My Heart is a Stray Bullet
Kebedence Press, Cape Croker

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THE FINAL RESTING PLACE
by Henry Angeconeb

"Ambay, wii-chii-wii-ship, Nah-chee'Nah, o-da-na-iinnarun ki-tay-tay-bun otah-ye-mun" "Come with me, Henry, let us go and put your father's things away."

My mother came to my home one day at the Lac Seul Reserve and told me this.
"Ah-how, peka ga-o-shi-tab, " gii enah.
"Okay, wait, I will get ready," I said to her.
"Wedi, giiga ishi-pi-in, seebeeg." "Asenaa gaye peesh."
"I will wait for you by the river. "Bring some tobacco with you," were Mother's final instructions.
"Ah-how, wiiba pgio ga-pi-ah-ye, chi-wiichi-winnan."
"Okay, I will be there shortly, to go with you," I said.

It was summer, 1995 was written on the calendar. My mother had come to invite me to go with her and place my father's medicine bundle away. He had belonged to the Medewin Society, an Anishinabe Medicine Society. Apparently, my mother had found his medicine bundle in the attic of the family shed, after we had hidden him farewell on his journey to the spirit world two springs ago. Mother had waited for my return from Sault Ste. Marie.

When I arrived at the river, my mother had the canoe already. We got into the canoe and she placed the bundle ahead of her. We paddled across the river. We had to climb this broken sand bank. After reaching level ground, we went across this large clearing. This was where my ancestors, a long time ago, had gathered together every spring. For a long time, three days, four days, they would visit each other, feasting, dancing, singing and drumming. Nobody got intoxicated with firewater in those days, the firewater had not come yet. Everybody had fun. This was where they had their ceremonies, too.

After crossing the clearing, we entered a forest, full of balsam and spruce trees. Mother pointed to a spruce tree. Mother pointed to a spruce tree which was struck by lightning. She told me to never just take that kind of tree for firewood until I put some tobacco down.

We walked by the traditional burial grounds where my father was placed. Dear old Shomiss, he had worked so hard to provide for his family whom he loved. Fond memories emerged as I looked in his direction. A good hunter, he taught me to respect nature, even the four leggeds. Told me to always hang a moose's head on a nearby tree and place the animal's private parts nearby. He told me to respect the black bear and to never whistle at the Northern Lights. Out of his five sons and four daughters, he had chosen me, his second eldest son, to care for and look after a pipe. This pipe has been handed down for generations in the "Angeconeb" family. He had instructed me to smoke it if I was ever in distress or for my family or friends. And whenever I do, I always wonder the things the pipe must have seen and what stories it could tell.

"Mii omah," ekiddo nimama.
"This is where," my mother said.

It was way past the burial grounds. The ground was carpeted with thick green moss. Tall spruce trees surrounded us, sparsely. A lot of them had blown over. A lot of exposed tree trunks everywhere. It was so silent I could hear my heart beat.

"Kah-kwe mi-kow, mimwa-tik, kah-ki-kah-wah-shi-gwen" dig nimama.
"Try to find a nice fresh fallen tree," instructed my mother.

We finally found one big fallen spruce tree. My mother commenced to dig with her hands near the trunk area. The sand was dark yellow ochre and soft. She placed the bundle against the trunk and covered it with the sand she'd removed. She asked for the tobacco, took a finger full from the pouch and sprinkled it on top of the sand. She then placed moss on top of it.

"Mii-eway." "There," she said as she got up.
"We-kay pattenatta -- noon oni ni-no-cannon omah."
"There are a lot of these around here," she said, looking around.

On the way back she showed me where my great-grandmother's wigwam had stood in that clearing. On the shore, she told me how my great-grandmother used to cover her birch bark canoe with balsam branches to keep out the sun's heat from touching the pitch on the canoe.


"I feel very happy now, that you helped me place your father's medicine bundle away," she said.
I gave her a hug and we paddled across and went home.
Trickster’s Friend
*a traditional Seneca story*
as told by Joseph Bruchac

Long ago, there was a boy named Big Duck. He lived with his parents in a longhouse near the wide river. Although he was a goodhearted person, he was lazy. Whatever his parents asked him to do, he always tried to avoid doing it. They tried to tell him that trouble would find him if he acted that way, but Big Duck didn’t listen.

"Big Duck," his mother and father said to him one day, "Come and help us get firewood."

"I would like to help you," Big Duck said, "but first I have to go into the woods."

He went into the woods and started walking. He walked and walked until he came to a little clearing in the forest. There was a small longhouse there that he had never seen before. It was covered with beautiful designs. In front of that longhouse sat someone who looked to be the same age as Big Duck. He was very good-looking. He wore clothing made of dark-coloured deerskin covered with wampum beads. His long black hair was braided with white beaded skins. There was a crafty look on his face as he smiled at Big Duck.

"My friend," said the good-looking boy, taking Big Duck by the hand, "I have been waiting for you to find me. My name is Shohodionskon. You can call me Soji. Think of me as your friend."

Big Duck was pleased. This good-looking boy wanted to be his friend. "I am glad to meet you," Big Duck said.

"Do you like pumpkins?" Soji said.

"I love pumpkins," said Big Duck. "My mother makes them into pumpkin pudding. But it is too early for pumpkins. We have not even planted the seeds yet."

"Ah," said Soji, "that takes too much work. I don’t like work, do you?"

"No," Big Duck agreed. "I don’t like work at all."

"Then you need to learn the easy way to get pumpkins. Watch this."

Soji picked up a heavy club. He put his foot up onto a log and lifted the club above his head.

"Now I will make a pumpkin," he said. "Pumpkin, pop out!" Then, as hard as he could, he struck his big toe with the club and a big pumpkin popped out and rolled onto the ground.

"Can I do that?" said Big Duck.

"Ah," said Soji, "you can certainly try to make a pumpkin that way. But do not do it now. If you do it now, you will have to carry your pumpkin home with you. Wait until you get back to your own longhouse and then show your parents what you learned from me."

"I will do that," said Big Duck. He ran home as fast as he could and found his parents just coming back with their arms full of firewood.

"Where have you been?" asked his mother.

"I met a new friend," said Big Duck. "Let me show you what he showed me."

Big Duck picked up a heavy stick and put his foot up onto a log.

"What are you going to do?" asked Big Duck’s father.

"I am going to make a pumpkin by hitting my toe," Big Duck said. "My friend Soji showed me how to do this."

"He has met Shohodionskon," said Big Duck’s mother. "I knew this would happen."

Big Duck’s father took the heavy club from his son’s hand and gave him a smaller stick. "Just make a little pumpkin first," his father said.

"Now I will make a pumpkin," Big Duck said. "Pumpkin, pop out!"

He hit his big toe as hard as he could with a stick. But no pumpkin popped out.

"Ah-hoo!" Big Duck dropped the stick and grabbed his toe. It was not as big as a pumpkin, but it was swelling up to twice its normal size. "That really hurt!"

His father helped him into the longhouse. His mother nursed his injured toe and put him to bed. When he got up next morning, it still hurt, but the swelling was almost gone.

"My son," said Big Duck’s mother, "I would like you to come with me to help me in the field today."

"I would like to help you," Big Duck said, "but first I have to go into the woods."

Big Duck limped into the woods and started walking. Because of his hurt toe, he could not walk very fast. So he was surprised at how quickly he ended up at the same clearing where he had been the day before. Just as before, his friend Soji was sitting in front of his small longhouse. Today he had a knife in his hand.

"My friend, Big Duck," said Soji, "Why are you limping? Did you make many pumpkins yesterday?"

"It didn’t work," said Big Duck. "No pumpkins popped out and I hurt my toe."

"Ah-ha," said Soji, "Did you use a heavy club?"

"No," Big Duck said, "My father told me to use a little stick."

"Perhaps if you had used a big club," Soji said with a sly smile, "You would have made a big pumpkin. But today I am not making pumpkins. Today, I am going fishing the easy way."
"What is the easy way to go fishing?" Big Duck said.

"Come with me and I will show you."

Sojy led Big Duck to the river and sat down on the bank.

"Now I will make my leg into a fishing spear," Sojy said.

He took his knife and began to whittle his leg into a spear. Then he jumped into the river and began to spear fish with his leg. When he hopped out again, he had many big fat fish. He pulled them off, rubbed his leg with his hands and his leg looked just as it had looked before it had been whittled into a spear.

"That is a good trick," said Big Duck. "Can I do that?"

"You can certainly try to do that," said Sojy. "But don't do it now. You would have to carry those heavy fish all the way home. Wait until you get back to your own lodge."

Big Duck limped home as fast as he could. By the time he got there, his mother was returning from the field while his father was tanning a deerskin.

"Come with me to the river," Big Duck said. "I have learned an easy way to get fish."

"Who taught you this?" said Big Duck's mother.

"I think I know," said Big Duck's father.

"It was my friend, Sojy," Big Duck said. He led his parents to the river and then took his knife, which hung from a cord around his neck.

"I will now make a fishing spear," he said.

"My son," said Big Duck's father, "what are you about to do?"

"I am going to whittle my leg into a spear."

"I see," said Big Duck's father. "If you are going to do that, try not to cut too deep when you start whittling."

"Watch this," said Big Duck. "As soon as he started to whittle on his leg, it started to bleed.

"Ah-ah," said Big Duck, "this hurts."

His father handed his mother a mullen leaf to use as a bandage for their son's cuts.

"I do not understand why it worked for my friend and not for me," Big Duck said as his parents cared for his wounds.

"My son," said Big Duck's mother, "are you sure that Shohodieonskon is your friend?"

The next day, Big Duck's father woke him up. "My son," he said, "come and help me make a dugout canoe."

"My father," said Big Duck, "I would like to help, but first I have to go into the woods."

Then, just as he had done the two days before, Big Duck walked into the woods and kept walking. This time it seemed as if he had only taken a few steps before he found himself back at Sojy's little longhouse. Sojy sat there with his hands full of long rawhide strings.

"My friend, Big Duck," said Sojy. "I am glad to see you. But why do you have a bandage on your leg."

"Your trick didn't work. I was not able to make a fish spear. I just cut myself instead."

"Ah did you start by whittling deep?"

"No," said Big Duck, "my father told me to start by making little cuts."

"Ah-hah," said Sojy with a sly grin, "perhaps it would have worked if you had done it my way. But today I am not going fishing. Today I am going to catch geese the easy way. Come with me."

Big Duck followed his friend to a large pond. Out in the middle of the pond was a large flock of geese.

"Watch this," said Sojy. He slipped into the water holding a rawhide string in his teeth. He swam under the geese, tied the string to the leg of a goose and pulled it under. When he came back out, he was carrying that goose under his arm.

"You see," Sojy said, "This is the easy way to catch geese."

"Can I do that?" said Big Duck.

"Yes," said Sojy, "you can certainly try."

"I had better try now to make sure I do it right before I show my parents."

"Ah," said Sojy, "you are getting smarter. In that case, you had better practice a lot.

Here, take all of these strings. And be sure to tie them tight to your wrist so that you don't lose any of the geese you catch."

Big Duck took all of the rawhide strings. He tied them all tightly to his wrist. Then he slipped into the water and swam under the geese. He began to tie his strings to their legs. When he had tied them all, he pulled hard. But he had tied so many geese onto his strings, that he could not pull them underwater. Instead, those geese started to flap their wings and they flew up into the sky carrying Big Duck with them.

"You've got them now," Sojy shouted up to him.

As the geese flew along, Big Duck was so heavy that they could not fly very high.

"This is good," Big Duck said. "I have caught all these geese and I have also found a new way to travel without having to walk."

Soon he was over his parents' longhouse. He looked down and saw his mother making a fire while his father worked on the dugout canoe.

"Mother," Big Duck called down, "Father! Look at all the geese I caught."
Big Duck’s parents looked up and saw their son being carried away by the geese.

“Oh no,” said his mother, “he has gone to visit Shikodieonskon again.”

As the geese flew along, Big Duck began to get worried. If they carried him too far away, he would have a long walk back home. He pulled on the strings to make the geese turn around, but they just kept flying.

“How can I get down?” Big Duck said.

Then he remembered that his knife was still hanging around his neck. “I know what to do,” he said.

He took his knife and began to cut the cords around his wrist. As soon as he cut the last one though, he began to fall. Fortunately, he was not very high off the ground. However, he was right over the top of a big dead tree with its top broken off. When he fell he went right down into the hollow of that tree and was stuck. There was a hole in the tree just big enough for him to look out. He could see that he was close to the ball field. A group of girls from the village were playing ball.

By now, Big Duck finally realized that his friend Sojy had been playing tricks on him.

“I am tired of being tricked,” Big Duck said, “Now I will trick someone else. I will trick those girls. I will pretend I am a bear and scare them.”

Then Big Duck tried to roar like a bear. The girl who was closest to the tree heard him.

“What was that sound?” the girl said.

“I am a bear,” Big Duck growled, “I am inside this tree.”

The girl turned to her friends, “There is a talking bear in this tree,” she shouted. Go get axes so that we can cut the tree open and get him out!”

The other girls did as she said. But when they cut open the tree, there was no bear. There was Big Duck.

“Big Duck,” the girls said, “what are you doing caught in a tree?”

Big Duck could not answer them. He was too embarrassed. He went straight home to his mother and father.

“My parents,” Big Duck said, “whatever you would like me to do, I am ready to help you.”

From that day on, Big Duck was no longer lazy. And he never visited the little longhouse of Shikodieonskon, the Trickster, again.

WINDIGO a traditional Ojibwe story as recounted to Meredith Ramsey by John Laford

The popular and fearful Ojibwe legend of the Windigo continues to be discussed very carefully and frequently through Indian land on cold northern nights. Windigo stories have existed for years and today people wonder if the Windigo truly exists, where it may lie, and what kind of terror it is capable of.

The stories reveal that the Windigo would come out in the coldest of winter, day or night. It has no prejudice of victims, so all must beware. It is said to inhabit the northern Lake Windigo, but really all over the north woods, emerging only during the extreme, still, cold. Its prey is always unaware but it is believed that they sometimes could surrender themselves to this mysterious spirit. It feeds on humans so precisely and completely that there are no remains. Nothing is left. It takes the unprepared and consumes them without a trace.

Windigo stories have been depicted throughout the woodland Native culture, in art, crafts and storytelling. Norval Morrisseau’s painting, “The Windigo” (1964) may well portray how one must always beware of the possibility of the Windigo’s presence, in spite of modern attitudes and comforts. To be complacent is to be vulnerable. Just when one feels everything is fine, and that this legend is just a story of the past, is the time when the Windigo may be there. The Windigo remains lurking, ravenous, always watching for its unsuspecting prey.

Some time ago, maybe still today, ceremonies were designed under the instruction of a shaman, to feed the Windigo great offerings of food to appease its appetite. Stories have been heard that even the dead were offered.

It has also been suggested that the extreme and exact type of cold may invoke the occurrence of disappearing people. The Windigo creates the coldness. The bodies are frozen. The remains are climatically freeze-dried, crystallized then swept away into the landscape. Again, no evidence. The coldness envelops the being, even their spirit, freezing them into nothingness.

However horrific this legend may seem, we cannot disregard it. The stories continue. The cold continues and perhaps what we know about the Windigo remains unknown because of its paralyzing fear.
Notes on contributing Writers:

Henry Angeconeb is an Anishnabe living in Sault Ste. Marie (Canada).
Kateri Akiwenzie Damm is Anishnabe (Chippewas) Nawash First Nation, Saugeen Peninsula (Canada).
Viktor Allen is Nga Pahi, living in Aotearoa.
Kimberly Blaeser, an Anishnabe, lives in the USA.
Joseph Bruchac, an Abenaki lives in the USA.
Joseph A. Dandurand is Kwasten, living in Canada.
Dawn Dumont is Cree and lives in Canada.
Briar Grace-Smith is Nga Pahi, living in Aotearoa.
David Groulx, an Anishnabe, and currently lives in Victoria, Canada.
Dean Hapeta is Ngati Raukawa, living in Aotearoa.
Al Hunter is an Anishnabe living in Canada.
Wa'li Dimarca is Ainanga-a-Mahaki Rongowhakaata/Ngati Porou living in Aotearoa.
Alootook Ipilie is an Inuit artist and writer living in Canada.
John Laford is an Ojibwe artist living in Algoma Country.
Norval Morrisseau is an Ojibwe artist living in Canada.
Peter Migwans, Ojibwe, lives in Sault Ste. Marie, Canada.
Melissa Natanazaxba Begay is Dine, living in the USA.
Marcie Rendon, Anishnabe, lives in the USA.
Armand Garnet Ruffo is Anishnabe, currently in Ottawa, Canada.
Robert Sullivan is Nga Pahi, living in Aotearoa.
Haunani-Kay Trask is a Native Hawaiian living in Hawai‘i.
Richard Van Camp, Dogrib, lives in Canada.

COVER ARTIST: JOHN LAFORD born in 1954, is an Ojibwe artist from Manitoulin Island, Ontario. He has studied his culture thoroughly. Laford studied art at the Algoma University College in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and, Zuni pottery at the Institute of Indian Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He has also closely studied the old pictographs or rock paintings of his ancestors. He has painted extensively with native artists such as Jim Simon and Carl Beam, and has also spent considerable time painting in New York and Spain. Although he sees himself as a self-taught artist, these studies have brought him social awareness leading to an openness to many ancient and contemporary styles. His paintings can be found in museums across Canada, the United States, and Australia, as well as in numerous private collections. His solo exhibitions include Indian Hills Art Gallery, Petoskey, Michigan, 1989; Sa Nostra Gallery, Ibiza, Spain, 1988; Gallery St. Luke, Toronto, Ontario, 1988; Triskelion Gallery, Bad Neuenheim, West Germany, 1987; Carnegie Cultural Center, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1986; Daymac Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, 1985; McDowell Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, 1983; Christopher Hughes Art Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, 1983; Institute of Indian Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico, travelling, 1982; National Museum of Man, British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, 1982; Gallery of British Columbian Arts, Vancouver, 1981; Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, West Bay, Ontario, 1979; and Shyane Gallery, Montreal, Quebec, 1979. His group exhibitions include Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, 1989; Triskelion Gallery, Bad Neuenheim, West Germany, 1989; Gallery Frison, Vienna, 1981; Chateau de Marly-le-Petit, Friburg, Switzerland, 1980; Royal Ontario Museum, 1978; Festival of Native Art, Tundra Gallery, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, 1977 (for further information contact: Al Gordon, Tundra Gallery, 131 Meadow Park, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario 705-942-9716).

THE STORYTELLER (cover image): "The Storyteller tells of the Bear and where he went. There were different kinds of birds away over there, back in the forest somewhere, and two Bears were playing. The Bears were fishing for something in the water; so it is that the Storyteller is pointing. Maybe he has a point in life." -- J.L.

Documentation: This limited edition print was published in 1997. It was hand produced by the screenprinting process. The edition consists of 160 signed and numbered copies, 16 artist's proofs and 1 printer's proof. Paper: Stonehenge Cover White (rag). Paper size: 35 cm x 52 cm. Image size: 28 cm x 42 cm. John Laford's prints and acrylic paintings are inspired by the images of spirit power from the ancient rock art of the Canadian Shield of Northern Ontario and deal with legends of his people, the Great Ojibwe. His works usually depict mysticism in human/nature relationships. Laford's aim is "to put down on canvas what the Indian shamans did."