

Chi-noodin

Native American Community Writers Group

Issue One

We Write for Ourselves



Insight and Stories from the
Chi-noodin Community Writers Group

The *Chi-noodin* Community Writing Group:

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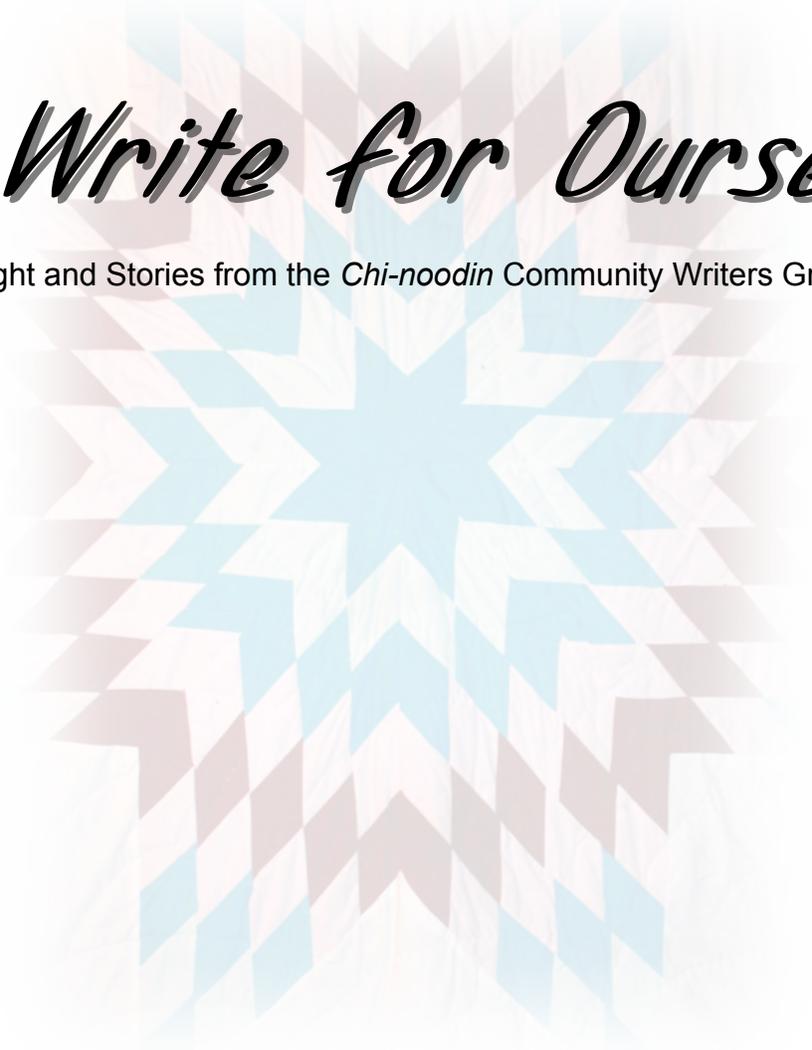
The Kateri Center of Chicago

Georgina Roy, Director
The Staff and Volunteers of the Kateri Center

The *Chi-noodin* Community Writers Group is made up of various members of the Chicago Native American community to write and share their experience of living in the city of Chicago and presenting a modern cultural view of Native American people today.

The Community Writing Project hosts writing workshops for people who ordinarily do not consider themselves to be writers, and publishes their reflections on everyday life. Because only the collective efforts of ordinary people can make a better world, we are particularly interested in the creative expressions and unique understandings of those who have been relegated to the margins of society, including the poor, the oppressed, immigrants, and those who risk their privileges to join them. Their stories are found in these pages.

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Introduction: Session I Publication By Negin Almassi with Janise Hurtig

Staff from the Title VII program organized the *Chi-noodin* Community Writing Group as a way of shining a light on important insights, experiences, and stories written by Native people in the Chicago community. Every Friday from February to April, the group met in a warm, bustling room at the Kateri Center, housed at St. Benedict parish in the North Center neighborhood. Four people came the first week, and immediately the writers delved into stories about the loss that came with moving away from home—for many, of moving away from their rez. The authors instantly brought immediacy to those stories by vividly engaging all of our senses. Like Dorothy Roy's story, *My First Day in Chicago*, in which she writes: "The sidewalks and the streets were giving off their own heat and to top it off there was the smell of asphalt, fumes, and blended factory smells, from paint to bakery to candy."

Each week the writing group grew, as participants invited friends and family to join. Many stories revolved around the depth of love for family. One example, Sarah Jimenez's touching poem, *Where I Go to Rest*, reminds us of the beauty of new life. The group spent a few weeks tackling the experience of crossing physical and cultural boundaries. These blended into stories of crossing institutional boundaries – something that Josie Dykas writes about with humor and boldness in "Breaking Rules."

While each story is crafted with its own creativity, a few writings invite us to see inside the writer's artistic mind. Norma Robertson's *What I Do* takes the reader through her creative process when she is beading. Georgina Roy's *A Place Where I Go to Relax* shows how her pastime of "junking," as she calls it, is also a creative and caring process of finding gifts for her loved ones. And Robert Wapahi's *Crooked Lines* simultaneously challenges readers to re-conceive the value of straight lines, while providing insight into his artwork.

Each of these writers is pushing back against assimilation, living in the city, and institutional silencing of Native history. The authors in this publication challenge those forces by writing stories from their lives, in their own words. The Title VII program's hope is that more members of Native communities will be inspired to do the same.





Crooked Lines

Robert Wapahi
Dakota – Nebraska

When speaking to groups I usually begin by telling them that for hundreds of winters the area from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Lakes region was our playground.

For thousands of winters we had never seen one instance of a straight line in nature, in any of the living things. Not in anything that walks, crawls, swims, flies or that rests. Millions, no billions of objects and all of them composed of crooked lines.

In this day, through the sciences, we come to understand that it also continues to infinity in largeness and smallness.

The Wasicu have come and we are totally immersed in straight lines. In this room alone there are thousands of straight lines at my fingertips and in my eyesight.

These lines, which are in effect borders, are what made my uncles' eyes hurt when they lived in the cities.

My First Day in Chicago

Dorothy Roy
First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng

I arrived at night, before midnight maybe. And now I realize I was near Fullerton and Western by the Kennedy Expressway. I could hear the rush of water like waves. I commented, "Is that a lake nearby?" And I heard my cousins say, "Yeah there's a lake out there," and with a big group laugh. In the morning I found out it was the Kennedy Expressway.

I couldn't believe how anybody could survive the heat without a lake. The sidewalks and the streets were giving off their own heat and to top it off there was the smell of asphalt, fumes, and blended factory smells, from paint to bakery to candy. I am thinking, "How am I going to survive here? I can't stand the smell and the heat, and plus the water tastes like it is chemically mixed."

I remember thinking, "I am going back to my reservation." And plus I was lonely for my family anyway.



What I Do

Norma J. Robertson
Dakota – South Dakota

Beading needle size 13, beading thread size double O, and size 13 beads, pretty reds, sparkling blues, shiny pearl whites, brilliant yellows, stunning oranges, Cheyenne pink, my favorite, and of course black. Next, what kind of design am I making? I look through the Indian magazines, through my books that have pictures on Native beadwork. Okay, I found a design, now will it fit on a knife sheaf, purse, leggings, moccasins or what? What colors will this project be, does everything have to match? Who is this project for – me, grandchild, daughter, or a non-relative, a paying person?

Where I Go To Rest

Sarah Jimenez

Ojibway/Puerto Rican

Part I

When I first walked through his door, he was three weeks old. I see the crib, hear his whimper, and my mom places him in my arms. New life. New hope. A love I never knew. This is my li'l brother's room.

Now I have to knock. This is amazing! Now I have to wait to be invited in. Now, I see he is growing. He invites me to sit and play this video game... I have no clue! All I know is, I feel home... in my brother's room.

Part II

I see a swaddled, shrunken old man in the crib.

Then I watch him grow into a toddler with a messy bib.

Wait, he's running to me with love, I want to cry.

Wait, what happened... time...
from baby powder to DKNY?

Years roll along...

"Just the two of us"

Is our song

What was mom thinking, "Me, Godmother?"

Yes, I say, I'll watch and protect my li'l brother.



A Place Where I Go to Relax

Georgina Roy

First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng

I like to go to my favorite store, the secondhand store. I call it "junking." Looking at other people's treasures, I do this at least once a week. This is my stress relief. As I go up and down the aisle, I begin to ask myself, "Who in my family would like these objects?" As I touch the clothing, I feel memories flowing through my fingers. "I used to own something like this," I think, or "I know someone who has that." I love to buy clothes for my grandchildren. I look for soft, warm, fuzzy items.

The time flies as I look at things. My mind is on vacation: no thoughts of work, city noises, or smells. People in the store want to talk and ask me questions, or ask me for an opinion on an item. Sometimes they want me to model for them! They think I work there! I must have that look. I just move to the next aisle. Then I get lost in the books... I love the titles! I just want to take them all home with me. As I select my items, before I leave the store I ask myself, "Do I really want to buy this?" When I make my mind up and leave, I feel so good. In a way I just visited many places, and that is why I love junking.

A Time I Crossed a Border

Debra Yepa-Pappan
Jemez Pueblo/Korean



My story. I'm Korean and Jemez Pueblo. I was born in Pyung Taek, South Korea. When I was five months old, my mother and I left Korea to come to the United States so we could live with my father.

My parents had met when my dad was stationed in Korea. He willingly joined the army because he didn't want to get drafted. This was during the Vietnam War. He was lucky to have been sent to Korea and not Vietnam.

He met my mother while stationed there. I'm not so clear on how, but I'm pretty sure she worked nearby the army base. I don't know if it was love at first sight; maybe it was. My dad always had a picture of my mom of when they first met in his wallet.

He was brought back to the States before I was born. He had to have known my mom was pregnant before he left, or how would she have been able to contact him afterwards?

We left Korea on December 24th, 1971. We left because my mother didn't want me to grow up as a half-breed in Korea. Half-breeds in Korea then, and unfortunately still today, are not regarded well by others. My mom knew I would not have a chance to have a happy life there, but most importantly she wanted me to grow up with my father.

It was such a huge sacrifice for her to leave her homeland. She was about 21 with a five-month-old baby, leaving the only place she knew. She didn't speak much English either.

There were so many obstacles she had to face once we arrived in America. First were the many cultural differences and of course the language barrier. I remember her telling me about her first experience when she arrived at the airport. She was breastfeeding me and people were appalled. They were looking at her in disgust for doing something that is absolutely normal. I can't imagine how scared or angry she might have been. As a mother now, I know how protective you become when you're with your child, especially when your child is a baby. But I also know how scary things become, because you worry about harm coming to your child. I think of what my mother went through, how strong she had to be, how determined she was to give me the life she knew I deserved.

We reunited with my father, met his family – my family – in the process. We lived in Jemez Pueblo with my grandmother while my dad was securing a place for us to live. He was still in the Army.

I don't know this part of the story very well except for my mother's accounts, but my father's family didn't treat us well. Not in the beginning. Apparently they had a problem with my mother being Korean. With me being part Korean. I wonder if she ever realized that I was facing the same kind of prejudice here that I would have encountered in Korea.

I can say that things are not that way anymore. My parents eventually were married and we moved to Chicago when I was about one and a half. We've been here ever since, though my dad did pass away almost seven years ago now. My father's family adores my mother; she's practically Jemez herself now.

I am the person I am now because of both my parents, because of the things they've taught me, because of the pride they've both instilled in me. This is not to say I haven't gone through my own difficulties or prejudices from others, but thank you Mom and Dad for demonstrating your strengths and showing me how to be a good person!

Reduced to a Whisper

Dorothy Roy

First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng

The Ojibway language was strong on the reservation when I was growing up. Everyone needed a translator. If you went to a grocery store or to a doctor or anywhere you needed to speak English.

Slowly the school system demanded and forced that English-only rule. This was a big change. There were teacher monitors in the hallway and playground. Your Ojibway voice would get lower as they came closer because you knew something would happen if they heard it. I remember my girlfriends and I hiding in the coat closet from the teachers as they walked by the hallway. We would whisper in Ojibway, "How do we speak now? We can't speak English."

Today new Ojibway speakers are non-existent. This remains a dilemma for our native country: how to reverse this?



Dominant Society

Josie Dykas

Yaqui/Polish

Society says "Lose who you are, be who you want." To some, this might sound great. To me it is not.

Lose who you are... many of us didn't have a choice growing up to know who we are, because past society dictated to our ancestors that "who we are" was bad. Growing up, I had an empty feeling, always searching to fill the void I felt within.

I try to ask questions, only to be discouraged. After much discouragement, I start to numb myself and go along with societal norms – disrespect for myself and for others, partying, MTV... but the emptiness is still there.

I decide to go along with everyone, who cares where I am from... The emptiness still lingers. I'm tired of the feeling, but how do I get rid of it? Going along with everyone just makes it grow larger and deeper within my heart.

Enough is enough! I give up everything, my stability, living here, my family, my fiancé... sell anything that can be sold. I drive and drive, end up finding people even more lost than myself. I remove myself from them, from everything.

On a mountaintop, stars shining, talking to me, I pray, I drum, I cry.

I realize the questions I always asked, other people can't answer because they are lost and don't know how to answer.

On that mountain, I find my answers. I know who I am.

The Storytellers in my Reservation

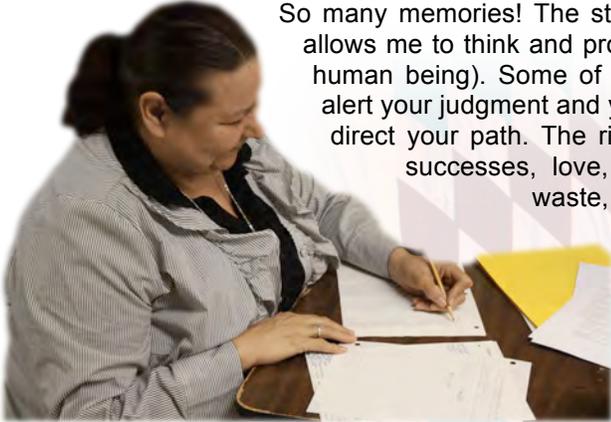
Georgina Roy

First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng

I was taught to work with God (*Zhimindoo*); that he or she was everywhere and in everything, as far as I could see and hear. These stories were from my community. They were the teachings in the *Anishanbek* ways. My parents were caring, wise, creative and strong people! They surrounded me with good folks they enjoyed having in our home.

These storytellers have had a big influence to this day. They are my consciousness. So many memories! The stories were told in *Ojibway*, my first voice, a gift which allows me to think and process ideas about how to be a good *Anishanbek* (good human being). Some of these stories were told to teach cautiousness, to also alert your judgment and yet these stories teach you to take daily steps needed to direct your path. The richness of stories teach about things such as failures, successes, love, dangers, death, life, the treatment of water, not to waste, and to respect *Aki* (earth) and all that was created. The storytellers shared wisdom, courage to be you, and how to be a good community person.

Miwe -- the end.



A Change I Would Like to See

Charles Roy

First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng

A change I would like to make is the way history is taught here in the United States. In my eyes, U.S. history is just a cover-up or it is sugarcoated. The schools teach that the people from dominant cultures are the heroes, when actually these white people were Indian killers and slave owners with a horrific past.

The U.S. schools don't teach Native American or Black history in elementary and high school grades. They don't even teach these subjects extensively in most colleges. This is one reason I feel that we are being written out of history and culture sensitivity is never learned. I know this is a very touchy subject for the U.S., but white people would rather forget their dark past.

By not acknowledging the Native American and African-American history, schools are not teaching history. I once read from another Indigenous person, "They must stop teaching HIS-story and start teaching OUR-Story!"

One thing I did learn in history is the Holocaust of the Jewish people by the Germans and their genocide policy. What people in America fail to see is that Native American/ Indians and Black people also faced an American Holocaust and genocide policy, and we still feel the effect of these events today.

The reason I am adamant about this change is my six-year old daughter, Amber. She already faces ignorance in her young life. When schools teach history accurately, children will understand culture and the struggles in this country.



Northern Nevada Seasons and Landscape

Jolene Aleck

Northern Paiute/Western Shoshone



The Northern Nevada landscape around my grandmother's home where I grew up is sensational. As a young person I explored, I explored every place possible! The hills had so many different types of rocks. We all collected them – my grandmother collected them, my auntie, nieces, and now my daughter does too.

We had so many adventures near the river every season. Time stood still as I looked around sandy beaches or the swampy areas. At night large birds would nest and it seemed like a very spooky, beautiful forest at times. In the summer, I walked along dirt roads or the ditch to visit friends and family. In the fall, sometimes the smell of wood stoves burning filled the air. The rain could come at any time of year, and the droplets released the delicate, fresh scent of sagebrush. The scent would fill the air-- sweet smell of the sagebrush mixed with the dirt or sand. When people I know have left Nevada, this is a smell they miss.

The summer is memorable. The lake has many shades of blue during the seasons. Some colors have no name. Lying on the beach, hearing seagulls, pelicans gliding along the water, waves crashing against the tufa rock is peaceful to me.

The water was always cold, but when you hopped in it didn't matter anymore. Special places along the shore carried so many memories. The gold dust in the lake amazed me. I would dive, pick up a handful of sand, drop it, dive under it and look up and see the gold sparkle in the sun. These are the memories that I pray my daughter will experience.

Breaking Rules

Josie Dykas

Yaqui/Polish

I was born to break rules. It's in my blood. Ever since I can remember, I questioned things.

Was it breaking a rule when I was three years old and wouldn't say please when Jackie bought me a Winnie the Pooh stuffed animal that I loved? She said she bought it for me and I could have it if I would just say "Please." Jackie would do this all the time, buy something she knew I would love and try to get me to say "Please." I think it ended up just being a game for me. I knew if I stood my ground and said "no" eventually she would get tired and give it to me anyway.

Or was it breaking a rule when I was in first grade and I woke up late for school? My brother and sister drove me, dropped me off in front, watched me walk up to the school, and drove away. When I got to the doors, I decided I didn't feel like going in and walked home. The school freaked out because the office ladies saw me walk to the doors and then walk away. They weren't sure what had happened so they call my mother. I got home a while later; I felt like taking the long way home. My mother was mad saying, "Josephine, why didn't you go into school!" I replied, "Because I didn't want to."

There are many reasons, I realize now, that I didn't want to go to school. At home I was the baby. I was the youngest, but looked like everyone else. At school, I looked like Robbie Gonzalez, that's it. Everyone else looked like my Polish side, but I didn't.

I remember in kindergarten, I was asked to draw my family. I drew a big white man, a smaller brown woman, and five brown kids. Ms. Bauer yelled at me saying, "Why do you keep doing that?" I said, "You told me to draw my family. My father's white."





“That’s What She Said”

Leonard Malatara
Confederated Salish & Kootneai

He wuz checkin out those legs coming from underneath that miniskirt and he lost all direction. “Damn it,” he said to himself. “How can you let a woman have power over you like that? Instead of lusting after her, I should be explaining to her just how much chaos and corruption she is creating in my mind.”

That’s wut the invasion brought us, instead of walking in balance and harmony, we live in chaos and corruption. It ain’t about respect anymore, now it’s all about the missionary position.

Our ancestors knew of a truth that they lived by. It wuz humility. They walked in balance and harmony, with respect for each other, and with total humility. When I go in and pray, and there is a naked woman sitting next to me, my mind ain’t gonna be on God. That is the power that a woman has. Our Ancestors knew that.

The Indian woman wuz created in the likeness of the Creator. She has that power. She knows God, and God is with her. On the other hand, the Indian man wuz created from the four elements: Rock, Wind, Fire, and Rain. He ain’t gotta clue. No way at all to talk to God.

The Indian woman, instead of abusing her power, gave to the Indian man a way to speak to God. She humbled herself like that.

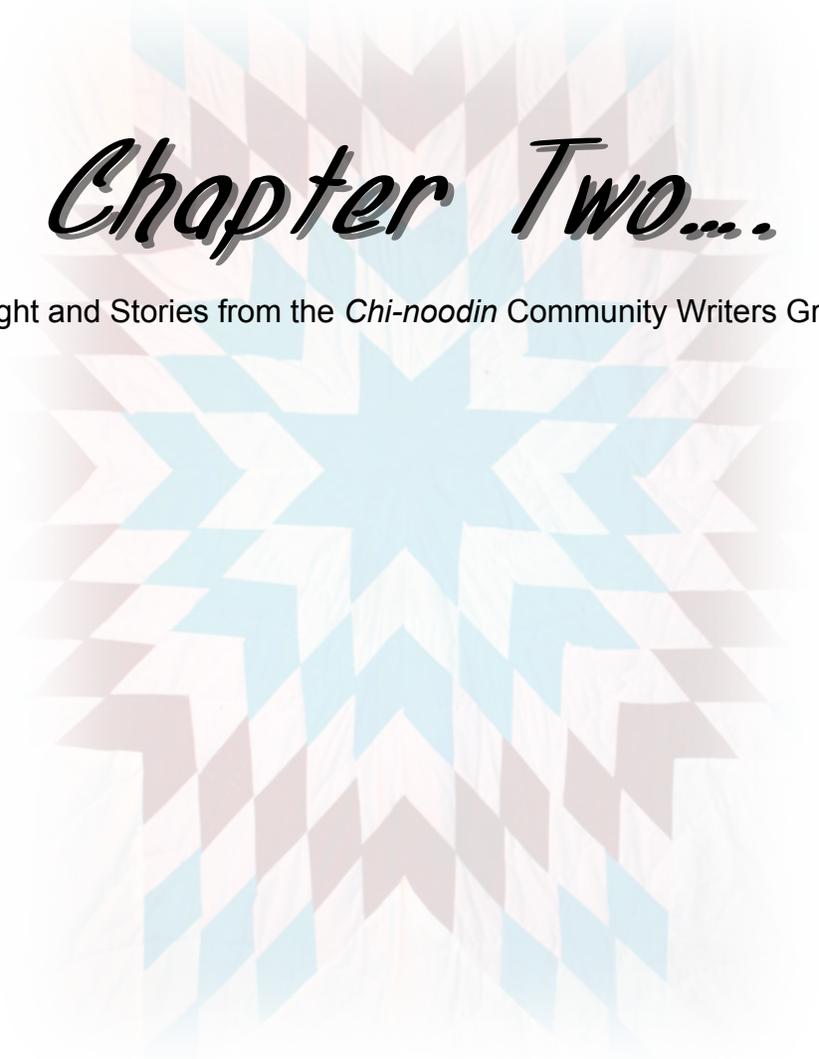
She gave the Indian man the Sweat Lodge. She instructed him on how to humble himself. She said to him, “You got to get naked, get down on your hands and knees and crawl into the lodge. Sit there in all your humility and suffer. Seek a vision, and when God thinks you are humble enough, he will talk to you and give you a vision.”

That’s what she said.



What does the future hold for these intrepid explorers?

Read on...



Chapter Two...

Insight and Stories from the *Chi-noodin* Community Writers Group

INTRODUCTION FOR SESSION TWO BY JANISE HURTEG

It is Friday, 11:10. Four of the *Chi-noodin* writers are sitting dispersed around the long stretch of tables that constitute the group's workspace in the large meeting room at the Kateri Center. Some are pouring over writings from the previous week; others are getting coffee or baked goods or a freshly prepared meal, its aroma wafting through the room, adding to the cozy ambiance. The room's walls, cabinets, and shelves display Native American books, art, and traditional crafts that silently speak to many of the themes the writers have taken up over the weeks: the assertion and expression of Native identity; the endurance of Native values; the transformation of Indian traditions and cultures across generations and places; the challenges and rewards of defending Native American ways of being. Eventually a few more writers enter the room. The facilitator hands them their writings and they settle into a spot around the table. By 11:30 the writers decide it is time to start.

This relaxed, gradual convening has become part of the ritual of the *Chi-noodin* writing group, now in its second year. It generates a warm, trusting, atmosphere that supports the group's work of reading and writing stories about their lives. Within this light-hearted, convivial space the group explores profound existential issues through writing and discussion. Sometimes writers tackle these issues through humor – as in Georgina Roy's story about firing her bigoted taxman; or Robert Wapahi's story about his Uncle Jess, otherwise known as "Unc." Other times they tell stories of generational struggle, as we find in Dorothy Roy's vignettes about the struggles about losing and then finding her voice in a white educational world that sought to silence her native language; or Norma Robertson's recounting of the naming of her father and her grandchildren. Yet other writers invite us to journey with them along their path toward self-determination – as does Lakotah Reyna in her essay "Acceptance," or Debra Yepa-Pappan in her reflection, "Call Me Names."

In a conversation about the value of community writing, Georgina Roy noted that, "It is important that we are able to write our own stories, the way that we want to tell them." As is clear from their stories, it is important to the writers and invaluable to the readers, for here there is no shying away from truth, reality, or laughter.

LAKOTAH REYNA

Biography of my handwriting

Handwriting. I hate writing long-hand. Handwriting is so messy, sloppy, and takes forever.

Handwriting. It has always been drilled in my head that its form and neatness should reflect who you are. "The importance," my grade school teacher would say, "is to show the world outside of you how clean, clever, and put together you are." I guess my world is atrocious and not put-together based on my sloppy handwriting.

Hours spent on form and neatness...Oh, the hell with it, I write the way I write. Who cares if it looks messy? Yes, I'm messy and I never claim to be perfect.

I first have to accept who I am and maybe say I'm a part of "Old World meets New World." Or is that new form of thought meets old form of thought?

Is handwriting formation supposed to imprint a prim and proper code of conduct of action and thought? Perhaps, if you lived in the 50's. These are different times now. No prim and proper here. I'm messy, I am me, an AIM-ster of handwriting if you will. I rebel against the formation of perfection to reflect up who I am. I will not be boxed into a corner. No 50's perfection here. Messy, abstract artist, perhaps slow, unrushed, and full intent of being normal and just who I am.

Where Writing Could Never Be

Photography, black and white, an art form now dying out in this new digital age.

Photography, my first form of communication, writing always taking the back seat. I could never find the proper word, form, or correct grammar.

The hell with it!

Photography could create a visual, a feast for the eye, a creative form of expressing feelings or telling a story.

Friendship, love, loss.

Visual images capture the sin, hurt, pain, acceptance, and the light.

It's all there in black and white speaking loudly of what could not be spoken.

Fear, suicide, understanding, redemption, and forgiveness.

For some time photography was my only faithful companion. Where writing could never be.

LEONARD MALATARE

Everybody Dance

All the Indians were sittin around making fun of the white man and black man dancin'. One Indian would say look at those two Ojib's, then the Ojibwe would say, "You liar, he's Flathead" and they would both laugh.

It was kinda weird, like here was two non-Indian dancin to the drum, but none of the Indians were dancin'. And yet the Indians were makin fun of em. Something was wrong with the picture.

Should I sit n judge? Or should I git up n dance, then would I qualify to be da judge? Or why do I gotta judge at all? Maybe I should jus shut up and dance! "Yea, Everybody Dance."

ROBERT WAPAHI

The River

Part 1. June, 2011. The Missouri River and some of its tributaries are overflowing their banks. That is affecting all the surrounding areas. Seldom is the region of my birth noticed. A flooding was what brought me to my river memories. The name Niobrara of Northeastern Nebraska brought to mind the people and relations. Namely Uncle Jess, or “Unc.”

Part 2. “*Unc.*” Jesse Walks Out, an uncle who had gone on to higher education before anyone else, was also the family disciplinarian. In all the winters together he may have spoken a full sentence maybe twice.

My brother Danny skipped school one day in the mid-fifties and Ina, Mom, sent word to Jess. He came right over and the atmosphere in the two-room house was altered. He came into the room, looked around, found a length of rope, and silently went out back to a tree that we all climbed regularly. Threw the rope over a good two-hand sized branch and came back in and sat and waited.

It was mid-morning and he only spoke to ask for a cup of coffee. In our language that is only two words: “mni-sapa.”

3:00 p.m. and in comes Danny. Jess, a full-fledged member of the “Ear Pulling Society,” gets hold of the lobe of Danny’s left ear and lifts. Danny, hollering, is led out to the dangling rope. We don’t have any idea what Jess said, but we clearly saw the gesturing and the ear being held firmly and appearing to go purple.

Danny never again skipped a day of school.

Part 3. My daughters, in 5th and 6th grade at the time, came up to me and showed me some writings they had done for school. Like mine, the works were short and vague. The spelling and grammar were good but again to the point with just the bare minimum of words. They wondered and asked me how they could expand anymore on what I read. Their grade-mark was a “C” or average. I thought that they wanted to raise their scores. All that I came up with to make writing longer and more informative was to write all future papers as though addressed or communicating to a blind person.

A week or so later, one of them came running up to me and waved a paper in my face, and the prettiest smile beaming. Her grade was a “B” or a “B+” She never again had any problem with writing. The older girl got better also, but just was uncomfortable with writing long passages.

They both sent short stories to *Scholastic* magazine and just about lost it when they were both published that year.

Part 4. Last Visit In 1981, after living in the Hell’s Kitchen area of New York City for eleven winters, I brought three of my young children to Nebraska to meet my last living relation, Sarah Wapaha. She was then in her mid- or late sixties. As is usual for me, I was ready to leave within hours of arriving. My legs were moving rapidly in and out at the knees. I must have given a rapid fire verbal sketch of life in the “Big Apple” when she put her hand up, like a school guard, and told me of her latest observation. “You haven’t changed from when you were a kid. It just kills you to sit still. And now you speak so fast. I can pick out a word or so here and there.”

She knew me as the running around quiet boy, so I began to understand how change is very often “*Koyaanisqatsi*” – “life out of balance.”

DOROTHY ROY

Finding my Voice: For My Children

Part 1 I find myself finding my voice and then losing it. My grade school years in the reservation were spent trying to figure out how to speak English correctly. The teachers were always frustrated with the whole class. The teacher in front of the classroom would make remarks like “the cat got your tongue?” or “You’re a bunch of bumps on a log.” I remember I wished I could articulate English better so I could please her. I was always behind, so I would read my books at home and prepare so I would be ready to answer her questions the next day.

Part 2 I was always falling behind on school assignments. After school I would take my books home so I could understand better the next day at school. A lot depended on my Dad helping me Dad was the one in our family who could read English. One day after getting into trouble, not doing homework, I told Dad, “It’s because you couldn’t help me.” Dad said “If that ever happens again, you have the right to interrupt me. Bring the book with you and open to the page then. It doesn’t matter what I am doing.” To my amazement, in eighth grade I was chosen the valedictorian to represent my school.

Part 3 I find myself finding my voice and then losing it. During my children’s grade school years I had trouble speaking for them. I felt the people in public school had all these big degrees, and I was no match to them. Many times I had to say to myself, “You are the only advocate for your children.”

One time I told the principal my son’s fourth grade teacher was teaching like they were in kindergarten, that I wanted to move him. The principal said to me, “Mrs. Roy, you can’t expect a good teacher every year.” Then I told her, “You are wrong. My son is going to fall behind if we don’t resolve this now.” The principal still went on to say that my son’s teacher had high qualifications. After many visits to the principal, I went back to the principal and told her, “With all her qualifications, she’s not passing it on to the children.” Anyway, my son was moved to another class.

NORMA J. ROBERTSON

What’s In a Name?

In 1996 my daughter was pregnant with her first child and asked me about a name for this baby. Something as simple as a name, a name we all carry from infant, adolescent, teenage and adulthood.

This reminds me of the story of how my father received his name. My dad was born on George Washington’s birthday, thus George Washington Robertson. Later he became known as George Wash or Wash by his relatives or close friends. During World War II he joined the Army and after his discharge he was given his Dakota name, “Tatankan Geisedema,” Short Buffalo or Little Buffalo.

We are honored with a name, sometimes after a favorite friend or relative.

So fast forward to 1996, my first grandchild was to be named Chaske, which denotes firstborn boy. If my daughter would have had a second son, he could be called Hepan. Anyway, this first grandson caused another name change. I became a Kunsi, “grandmother,” and my daughter became Ina, “mother.”

GEORGINA ROY

My First Quilt

The first quilt that I made alone, I pondered the idea on the pattern to make from a donation my brother gave me, a whole box of neckties once owned by a man who had abandoned his apartment. Hundreds of ties: stripes, polka dots, flowers, holiday prints, every color you can think of. I thought, maybe I can sew them together side by side. But the ties were shaped in so many different styles. Back to the drawing board.

I ask for advice from my mother. She said, "If you make something you have to do it right, first make squares. They are easier to work with and you do not waste the materials. And you need backing to sew the ties onto. Because silk moves, each tie needs to be secure. Use a magoose (seam ripper in Ojibwe) and iron it with a pressing cloth. Then there is your first square. Now take your time to enjoy it."

Then Mom said, "Once you have about thirty squares you can sew with your choice of backing." It took me about four months to complete my blanket. It was beautiful, warm, and my own creation! I was so proud of myself and so was Mom. She said, "One more thing, what's your blanket called?" Out of my mouth the word came out, "Gentlemen blanket," because it was made from neckties.

When Mom spent the weekend at my house I would give her the gentlemen blanket to cover up with. In the mornings she would say, "Boy! That gentlemen blanket was soft. It kept me warm."

DAWN E. BEDELL

Put Your Money Where Your Foot Is

A good pedicure! I love going to those nail shops and getting my toes done. Soaking my puppies in bubbly, massage tub and if lucky, the chair I'm in is a massage chair. The most fascinating part is how they look like dogs' feet when you first get there, then after the procedure they are model perfect.

The reason why I say procedure is because the technician is trained to do it. They even use ultraviolet rays to sterilize the tools. The tools such as the blade to shave calluses, the file or stone, the cuticle clippers are not relaxing because it means sit still or lose a toe. My favorite is nail color, and the massage is great. Taking the time to get them professionally done makes me feel special about myself.

Stuck in the Middle

My mother is 100% Native American Indian and my dad is African American. Growing up was hard between the two races, especially with family. On my mother's side I wasn't Native enough because I was black, and on my dad's side I wasn't black enough because I was Native. I grew up just being me until I realized in school I didn't want to answer the Census because to say I was black denied my mom's side and vice-versa to dad.

It also influenced me on not voting for the President. Why would I vote for a government that killed my Native ancestors and enslaved my African American ones?

Now I don't think about stuff like that because I have a strong Christian background. It took God to show me I am fine the way I am, and I belong to one race: the Human Race.

DEBRA YEPA-PAPPAN

Call Me Names

“Call me names.” Chink, pieface, injun, redskin... I am Asian and American Indian, so I’ve gotten twice the racial slurs. There were many instances when I was a child where I was exposed to the ignorance of others, sometimes my close friends. I know kids can be brutally honest sometimes, but does that mean they have to be mean? Especially to someone who was so different from them. I was the only Asian in my class in grade school. I was also the only American Indian. I was the only Asian/American Indian . . . probably in the whole of Chicago. This was in the 70s.

As much as my parents had taught me to be proud of who I am, it took me a while to find my voice, to find my voice to speak out against all the ignorance. My mother fought that battle as well. She used to tell me about the times when she was at work and she would brag about being married to an American Indian and that her daughter is American Indian. She was very proud of that. People would say to her, “There aren’t any Indians left anymore!” Her response: “Are you stupid? I thought you were smart Americans! You don’t know that Indians are still around? I’m married to one and my daughter is one too!”

She shared these stories with me when she came home from work. I would laugh because I thought it so funny that her co-workers didn’t believe in my existence. I was always proud of my mom because she wasn’t afraid to tell those people off. Especially if anyone ever told her “Why don’t you go back to your own country!” Of course, she would throw that back at them and say, “You go back to your own country. This land belongs to Indians.” Way to go mom!

What strength and courage my mom possessed! I think her strength really helped me to deal with my own personal issues. Though as a child, I wasn’t vocal about it. There was an instance when I was in grade school. Being a latchkey kid, I had to take the CTA bus home from school, and then walk half a block from the bus stop to home. One day, as I got off the bus, a neighborhood kid said to me, “Hey Chink!” and laughed. I didn’t say anything to him, I only responded by giving him a really dirty look. I’m really good at giving dirty looks when needed! And in my head I said to him, “You’re stupid. I’m not Chinese, I’m Korean!” Hopefully that came across in my “dirty look.”

I did eventually find my voice. As an artist, I’m able to articulate and convey my thoughts visually, which in the end I think has a greater impact.

CHARLIE ROY

Stolen Identities: The Impact of Racist Stereotypes on Indigenous People

Geronimo was an Apache. Geronimo represents pride and freedom not only for his Apache people but all indigenous peoples. He also represents resistance to the encroaching Spanish from the south and European invaders from the east. Geronimo was trying hard to hold on and preserve their culture.

When going to Chicago public school in my early days, I always hated the first day of school. You would have to introduce yourself to the classroom and teacher. You would have to say your name and nationality. Then right after this, I knew what was going to happen next. I would get teased at recess time with whooping calls and other kinds of crap. This would last for days and even weeks sometimes. I was the only Ojibwe representing indigenous people in the whole school besides my little brother. Most years I would ignore them, but sometimes you just had enough. Next thing you know I was pushing and shoving them, tumbling on the ground with this instigator or instigators. Whoever said sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me was full of it.

In our way, you're supposed to choose your words wisely. When the U.S. armed forces operation found and killed Bin Laden, I felt that was a good thing. Yea, they finally got him, I thought at the time. Now maybe our U.S. troops can come home. I felt like a part of the United States. But when I found out that they used Geronimo's name as a code word for Osama Bin Laden, it really pissed me off. I had an instant genetic flashback of how it was when they killed one of our indigenous leaders. Seeing all the Americans cheering like a bunch of wild white people on TV. This is how it was. I can see it: "Now that their leaders are dead let's take their land and move them somewhere else or exterminate them all."

This makes me even more upset when I think about the large percentage of indigenous peoples in the U.S. armed forces who support this government. Why do our people help them fight these injustices or wars made of lies? This is not our fight. Our people have laid down their lives so that these big corporations can make billions of dollars with military contracts, when the U.S. government and big corporations are still trying to take our treaty land, water rights, and our natural resources.

Taking that name of Geronimo as code name for Bin Laden was so disrespectful all to the indigenous people here. They just opened a lot of old wounds. And to me the United States still feels that we are a problem to them. They compare us to a terrorist, when white people were exactly the terrorists to us. We were here first, if I can remember! When they were actually like the Nazis to us. And I do not want hear that excuse, that they were just ignorant and they were just not thinking. The U.S. government would never use the name Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, or even Donald Trump as a code name for Bin Laden.

I would like to say to United States, you must choose your words wisely. You have just started another racial stereotypical comment to tease our children with. Again, like someone said before, I'm feeling like an immigrant in my own country.

DOROTHY ROY

Communication

My great grandparents on the Debassige side did not speak any English. I remember one day visiting them. I said something in English and everything went silent. I realized what happened. This was a big realization for me. They said in their unspoken words English was not spoken in their presence.

This was a lesson for me. Throughout the years when I entered my grandparents' home I was careful to speak Ojibway only.

Mother

At the time of my growing up years money was not readily available. I was fortunate enough to have learned from a creative mother (Beshni, Ojibway name). Looking back, I wonder where she got the ideas and the knowledge to pull together some very interesting projects in decorating and home making.

She could sew gloves for us from an old sweater that got too small in the wash. You never knew what color the sweater would be, but instantly you had a pair of gloves. She was "green" ahead of her time.

She made dresses and boys' clothes from material she got from a woman's dress or a man's suit. I know she copied from the Simpson Sears catalogue for these tailored, beautiful outfits. She made the home comfortable by making quilts and homemade goose pillows. It's like she left me a giant bag of ideas for how to combine creativity with necessity.

A Place to Relax

I always liked my great grandparents' house, the great grandparents on my father's side -- "Debassige," which means "sun coming over the horizon." Their home was so relaxing and comfortable. The smell of apples everywhere, the aroma of the cast iron pot bubbling a stew, and the baked pies in the oven. The crisp white linens on the table and cupboards and nicely displayed dishes and glasses. The comfortable day couch and Grandpa's cushy chair. The crackly wood stove in the dining room throwing embers out and Grandma throwing them back in with her bare hands. I watched my grandmother move around her house attending [to] the things that had to be done. In the summer, I loved how the outside opened to the sight and smell of flowers and the apple orchard.

I just realized recently that this is what I am trying to achieve in my house, the cushy chair comfort. The constant aroma of apple is very hard.

NORMA J. ROBERTSON

My Jacket

My prized possession was my black leather jacket, and not a short jacket, but a long black leather jacket. I babysat and saved money to purchase this jacket. I purchased this jacket at Goldblatts on Lawrence and Broadway. I still remember that day, the location, and handing over my hard saved cash for this coat.

I was 15 years old, a sophomore in high school, and the crowd I hung out with all wore leather jackets, short ones or long. We had a certain way of talking, a certain way of walking and our dress or the type of clothes we chose to wear also said something about us. The black leather jacket reflected more than words. Sometimes we didn't even have to speak. Just walk into a dance, school, and our jackets could make a difference.

Thank goodness those days are over for me, a long, long time ago.

Probably there's a new bunch of teenagers facing this same issue of image. I wonder what their black leather jacket looks like.

GEORGINA ROY

Early Memories of Dad on the Reservation

My dad was a very tall, handsome man, with a voice that echoed. My sister and I were rarely asked to date because of our dad's giant, commanding voice. The boys feared him and wouldn't come to our house. All Dad wanted was for me to be a good human being. I witnessed his leadership in our community. He was big and important to the Chief and Council. Dad learned how to write and read the English language when he was in the Canadian Army. He raised me with a disciplinary hand and a gentle touch.

Dad learned in the military to make time work in his favor. Daylight to dusk, we all had marching orders and were told once what our tasks were. While Dad chopped firewood, my brother hunted for food, my sisters prepared meals, fresh vegetables were gathered daily from our huge garden that our mother maintained, hauling water from a fresh spring deep in the forest past our barn. The most important job was preparing the kerosene lamp. Heaven forbid if you broke the glass or broke the little mesh white bag for the gas light. Once the lamps were in place it was homework time.

Dad, "Bapa," made me feel special many times. In the mornings he asked what I had dreamt about. He would listen deeply and debrief my nightmares. He would take the time to hear us all, one story after another, me and my siblings.

My dad worked for the Department of Highways in Ontario, Canada. He would leave very early in the morning. Sometimes if you happened to be the first one up, you would get one-on-one with Dad. He would be packing his lunch with all kinds of snacks. There was your lucky moment, when extra snacks were shared at 6:00am, between you and Dad.

When big storms came Dad would assure us that our house was safe. Because when he built our home he used 9-inch nails and brick siding. For extra peace he would offer tobacco to the angry winds, thunder, and lightning that would light the dark skies. I was so proud that he had the power to calm the storm. Later, my cousins told me that their parents did the same thing, offering tobacco.

When Dad was laid to rest on the reservation, we all shared how he made each of us feel special.

I Fired My Tax Man

I had to have a tax accountant do my yearly taxes because I owned a childcare business that employed me, my family members and members of my community. I created all the forms, did countless interviews, monthly statements, and created lesson plans with fun activities. I loved this job.

The only time I felt pain was when I had to see the tax accountant. He was a giant of a man, Chi-monk, in Ojibway. It means big American knife. He was very ignorant of Native American people's ways. He would make stupid comments. Like one time he said that in his next life he wanted to marry a Native woman, "*Squam*," he said, who would support him. His gorgeous wife was only six feet away from his desk when he said this. I felt uneasy.

He asked me, "Where is your Indian money? Do you know I have clients with thousands of dollars? Even their children have huge amounts of money! Hey! Gina! Where are all the Indians in this city?" He answered himself, "In the bars, casino, reservation."

I said, "You would not know if an Indian walked by you. They look like most people out there. They are your kids' teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, caregivers, and in higher education." I tried hard to educate him, but each year the same thing would happen. I just wanted to choke him. But I did better. I fired him.

DEBRA YEPA-PAPPAN

Naming Someone

Before my daughter was born, Chris and I had decided that if we had a boy, we would give him an Indian name, and if we had a girl we could give her a Korean name.

We had a girl. She was born on March 6, 2002, at exactly 1:16pm.

We didn't have a name ready for her. We didn't want to pick some name at random or look through one of those yuppie baby books for one of the top favorite baby names. There is no meaning in that.

We wanted to do it traditionally the way it's done in Korea. My aunt, who had moved to Chicago from Korea only five months before my daughter was born, was trained in the art of charting a person's "Chi" using Chinese characters. I don't know how it works but it's a pretty precise method. My aunt has many clients that come to her for their charts. Many times they want to know whether it's a good idea for them to make a certain investment, if it's the right time for them to buy a house, what date would be best for them to get married, or other important decisions.

In our case, what name would be best for our daughter.

When she was born, she did not have a name. In order for my aunt to make her chart, she needed to know the exact day and time of birth. It took her at least one day to make our daughter's chart. Needless to say, we were all very excited to know our baby's name!

We had a choice of three names, Ta Young, Ji Hae, and I can't remember the third. They all basically had the same meaning. They were all very strong names. They were all a reflection of who our baby is, her inner chi, who she is fated to be.

Ji Hae. Ji Hae is my daughter's name. It means "wisdom." The Chinese characters for Ji Hae's name is a reflection of who she is. They symbolize all the elements, which indicate that her inner chi is well balanced, that she will be strong and bright.

"Ji Hae" is who she is. Her name is Ji Hae.

DAWN E. BEDELL

Legacy

My favorite person is a woman named Karen Horney. I feel partial towards her because she has a belief that everyone needs to feel loved and belong to something or someone. If I leave a legacy it would have to be that we are all one and we belong to the Creator and are very much loved. In this world we judge each other on weight, race, color, the list can go on and on but in the end we still have the same physical makeup. It is so important to know, as my mother would say, "I am here! Right now! For a reason dammit." We all have a purpose here, and regardless of how the world sees us it doesn't really matter as long as we acknowledge in ourselves that we are one, and belong just where we are.

A Way I Take Care of Myself

Taking care of myself is something I do daily. Like writing in my journal and finding ways to improve self-image. It is also important for me to have "me time." Sometimes my life is full of pleasing or making others happy. I forget about myself. Usually "me time" consists of prayer, stretching, or something that will rejuvenate me, like a walk in a damp forest preserve. I'm firm in the belief that you must love yourself before you can love others, so I take "me time" seriously.

LAKOTAH REYNA

Acceptance

For the most part of my life I had been lost. Like most people, starting out as children, we have struggles, we stumble on the road that we walk in life, always in the search of finding our place in this world... And this is exactly what happened to me.

In the beginning I had a spirit like no other fearless: daring, carefree, and very expressive. When I was three years old my mother sent me to my room for a nap. Sleep? I don't want to sleep, I want to play. Getting up, I boosted myself up onto the open window above my bed, climbed out and took off. Needless to say my mother was not happy after a hair raising afternoon of looking for her missing child. After finding me, she of course was beside herself with worry and fear. And me ... I didn't understand why. I was with my friends and I was just fine. Okay, granted anyone would be suspicious if your child had friends you couldn't see, I'll give her that. But really she didn't have to worry because I was with Creator.

Then one day, after my fifth year, it all changed. How or why, I have no idea. I only knew that something was different. My friends (imaginary or not) said their farewells and I did not see them again as I did when I was a child. Eventually through the years the memory of my best friend, Creator, was lost and replaced with the acceptance that I must have made it up. God was just too important and had far too many things to do than to hang out with one human little girl.

As I grew older, my biggest struggle in life was having no voice and I lived my life in fear: fear to try new things, fear to speak my mind, and the fear of people around me. But mostly I feared the unknown. To make it worse I was the only Cheppa (chubby) child in my family and I was always too distracted to keep my mind focused on one thing. It seemed that everything I learned came in through one ear and went right out the other. This expression could be used for just about every aspect in my life. I was a budding failure and stamped with big red ink, "Learning Disabled."

Growing up I learned not to love myself and to love others more. Somehow this made me happier...or did it?

"Never mind favorites, you're allowed to have one. The point is you're my favorite" This became my motto, however it quickly tarnished and eventually turned into the torturous, "You're the winner in me and I'm the loser in you." Geez, looking back at it now how devastatingly destructive that was. Wow, it seems almost unreal. I could see myself back then hanging off that cliff just by my finger and at any moment I was ready to fall.

Just after the new year of 1994, my childhood friend took his own life. This, like any suicide, is a crushing blow because you are left with the unanswered question of why. Alone you tread the choppy waters as you try to understand what happened and where it all went wrong. This event, as sad as it was, was a turning point for me, one which was just the beginning of healing and finding answers to some long unanswered questions.

(continued next page)

Acceptance (cont.)

Two months after his death my friend came to me and he had this to say: “Don’t be afraid and don’t take things for granted and don’t live a life in regret. Be yourself and find your own self-worth. This is your road to walk. You have a long ways to go from here and you will fall and falter, but get back up and continue forward, because you will learn that you are someone. You are a child of God.”

It had been a long time and he was right. I did have a long ways to go and I did fall and falter. I made mistakes, but what can you do? It’s a part of learning. It’s a part of being human, imperfect and perfect at the same time. Making mistakes and accepting it as a learning tool, having the knowledge for growth, self-awareness and self-love. In doing so I realized that my best friend, Creator, was never as far away as it seemed. He was always there beside me, and it was only temporarily that I could not see him as I had seen him as a child. When I realized and accepted myself and my place in this world, I could see his face again. I could see my friends (the ones people called imaginary) and I realized their true nature: love, respect, dignity, wisdom, hope, faith, and compassion. A true blessing, a true gift from Creator.

NORMA J. ROBERTSON

Staying Related through Language

Part 1. All my grandchildren call me Kungsi, which is a Dakota word. I had a Kungsi, my mother had a Kungsi, and her mother had a Kungsi. My daughters never had a Kungsi, though they did have an “Abuela” or short form, “Guela.” My dad was always called Unkana by my daughters.

The grandchildren call me Kungsi. They understand it is not my name, though one day they did ask and were surprised. “Norma!” Kungsi is a word used to denote grandmother. Kungsi is a word that represents our Dakota language, people, heritage, and grandchildren. Just as I call him Chaske, Teca, Toto and the youngest grandson, Hoksina.

We are all important to each other.

Part 2. My daughter was pregnant with her first baby, my first grandchild. Though surprised, we were happy about the baby. As the months passed and her due date for the baby drew near, she started to try out names. Oh yeah, we knew the baby would be a boy. Should he be called Peter, Alex, Joseph, Fred?

Then she approached me for a name, a boy name. I’d only had daughters. My brother’s name is Alvis, my dad’s name is George. Then I remembered the name “Chaske,” which in the Dakota language means first-born boy in a family. I explained, “He needs to know who he is and have a name that will remind him of who he is, an identity, that he is special to us.” After a short discussion she agreed. So on his birth certificate it says “Chaske Santana.”

Today my grandson is fourteen years old and is called Josh. Why? He says teachers in school had difficulty pronouncing his name and somehow it became Josh. His mother, aunt, and I call him Chaske, and his siblings call him Josh, though they know who we are talking about if we say Chaske.

Oh. By the way, my last grandson I call “Hoksina,” which means young boy in the Dakota language.

Today my granddaughter said to me, “When I get married and have a baby boy I’m going to name him “Chaske.” She said this after reading my stories. She understood nor now understands the meaning of the word Chaske.

GEORGINA ROY

Dream

I prayed many nights for my gifts to be revealed. An answer came through a dream. This happened nine and a half years ago. My prayer request was, show me my gifts, then place me in a place where I can use them. I'm ready to serve you, Chi-Manitou. I want to help my people." I remember being lifted into the sky close to the clouds. I saw this huge wooden picture frame. A man sat in a tall, big wooden arm chair, dressed in an outfit of a holy man in a long dark robe, cloth buttons from neck to feed and a bun shaped hat with a bright red button on top. Around his neck were these huge wooden prayer beads. He motioned me to come forward. Somehow I could hear my mother's voice telling my sister-in-law to stop crying. "She's going to a holy place. Let her go." This man spoke to me and said, "Someone wants to see you." I looked down and saw crowds of people who parted so I could see, and there was Zhimedoo (Chi-Manitou) dragging a huge cross. He stopped to take a look into my soul. He had a Nish body with long dark hair, dripping with sweat as large as pony beads, and he had the saddest eyes. With no words only looking deep into my eyes, he said, 'Tell my people I'm still dragging their cross.'" I felt pain when he turned and walked back into the crowd. The crowd closed in as he dragged off this huge wooden cross. I was slowly placed back on my feet on the ground. I woke up from this dream feeling so blessed and sad about what I had just witnessed.

I got up and started to journal my dream. I knew I must share it now. I began to dial long distance to awaken my mother in Canada. I said, Oh, Mom! I had the most beautiful dream of Zhimedoo." I said, "Mom, what does this mean?" She said, "Oh my gosh! You are called to serve Zhimedoo and great things will happen in your life. Some people wait for a lifetime for a message like this one." We began to pray in Ojibway for thanksgiving of a wonderful dream.

Many doors opened soon after. I earned my G.E.D. I was asked by a professor to teach a credit course on Ojibway language at our Native American College. My sister Dorothy and I created our own resources to teach. It was hard to find any kind of curriculum in Ojibway. We both applied for a four-year summer program at Lake Head University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. We both earned a teacher's certificate. In the meantime, a job opened at our parish Anawim Center for an assistant to the director. I applied for the job. The rest is history.

I forgot to mention: while I attended Lake Head University, I bumped into a man in a long corridor sitting in a huge chair, with oversize prayer beads, in his long dark robe, and with cloth buttons from his neck to his feet. I was speechless. On a brass plate was his name: Fredrick Baraga, the snow shoe priest who wrote the first Ojibway dictionary. He was my mystery man who helped find my gifts and put me in a place where I can use these gifts, through a dream I had nine and a half years ago.

Miiwe / the end

"Chi-noodin"

Chi-noodin means "big wind" in Ojibway to honor the City of Chicago

"miigwetch"

(Thank You)

For reading our stories....



The *Chi-noodin* Community Writing Group Will Return....

Chi-noodin

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