The Chi-Noodin Community Writers Group is made up of Chicago Title VII participants in the Native American community who come together to write and share their experience of living in the city, and to present a modern cultural view of Native American people.

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. 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.
We Write for Ourselves
Issue Three
The Writers

Josie Dykas, *Yaqui*
Michael Garcia, *Choctaw*
Maria Guzman, *Stockbridge Munsee/Mexican*
Monica Rickert, *Prairie Band Potawatomi/Black*
Norma Robertson, *Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate*
Raven Roberts, *Prairie Band Potawatomi*
Anthony Roy, *First Nations Ojibway*
Charlie Roy, *First Nations Ojibway*
Dorothy Roy, *First Nations Ojibway*
Georgina Roy, *First Nations Ojibway*
Robert Wapahi, *Santee Lakota*
Pat Xerikos, *Mille Lacs Ojibwe*
Debra Yepa-Pappan, *Jemez Pueblo/Korean*
Introduction

For the past three years, the Chi-Noodin ("Big Wind") writing group has convened weekly at the Kateri Center, a Ministry of the Chicago Archdiocese serving Chicago’s American Indians from the fall into the early summer. Each week participants come together to write about and collectively consider the resilience of their lives as urban Indians, their stories weaving into fine fabric the fluidity of their lives as they move back and forth between city and reservation, between family and friends, creating and recreating Native ways of being in the world, choosing to stay with their "Native roots," as Michael Garcia puts it in his story.

As we read Dorothy Roy’s description of her family’s creative uses of cardboard boxes, Debra Yepa-Pappan’s fond reflection on her father’s artistry as a cook, Georgina Roy’s poignant account of her mother’s “Kleenex blankets” and her family’s venture into the restaurant business, and Charlie Roy’s recollection of his uncle’s delectable, home-grown salsa, or Norma Robertson’s lush description of the summer home of her youth, each embed artistry and ingenuity into the family fabric. The centrality of art—its production and sharing—to Native self-expression and generational continuity is a brilliant strand that weaves through the writings of Robert Wapahi, Monica Rickert, Raven Roberts, and Maria Guzman.

A highlight of this issue is the series of writings that document and reflect upon the “Idle No More” movement, a bold response of outrage to recent Canadian regulatory injustices against tribal people that spread like wildfire across the Americas and beyond. Josie Dykas’ story, “Building Up Out of the Ashes” and Anthony Roy’s story “The Current State of Colonization” poetically address the root causes of those injustices while inspiring resistance.

As the stories in this magazine show, Native ways of being includes celebrating struggle, bringing artistry to resourcefulness, finding humor and beauty in the everyday, all the while sustaining an commitment to family and tribal community.

—The editors
When my family goes back to visit our Rez in the later summer, we reap the benefits of my uncle's hard work. In his garden, he grows green peppers, hot peppers, onions, tomatoes, baby tomatoes, and cucumbers. I feel bad for eating all of his vegetables. But he really seems to enjoy sharing his food. Once I made us some fresh salsa from his vegetables, except cilantro. Man, that was the best salsa I ever had. Just thinking about that salsa makes me lick my chops.

We also go back in our fields or bush. We go picking wild raspberries, if it’s not too late in the season. We always seem to miss the wild strawberries. Strawberries are indescribable and I’m glad I can share this experience with my daughter.
ROBERT WAPAHI  
Small Gesture  

I was watching a scene unfold. Then entering into a room, an offering of coffee, pointing to a chair with a "have a seat" and then a dialogue that lasts over half an hour.

During that time one picks up an item from this table to illustrate an idea or thought.

At the end as the one is about to leave the item is replaced with an exact placement to original spot and angle.

I was immediately taken back to an uncle and his coaching. "Don’t leave a trail" and don’t just “put it back.” Put it back exactly how it was.

Good old Uncle Joe.

RAVEN ROBERTS  
Strawberry Moon  

Rising early to greet the sun, the light burst through the city walls, the trees reaching to the top. Hello sun, thank you for loving and lighting our day once again. The waters sway, deer drink, birds fly. wings stretched, playing with the light between the feathers, creating paths on the Earth that reach toward the “Heavens.”

Breathing deep, letting the warm air fill my body, back to my brain and out my mouth helping plants bloom… clean, fresh crisp, freeing cooling misty waters fill the air creating rainbows every which way, dew like attitudes, easing the heat as we pick the first berries of the season, round plump juicy redness, spices fill the air as we drift home with our baskets just full enough, while our KoKos, our grandmothers, prepare and teach our first born “sistas.” Children watch and play nearby as the new day begins to awake, little birds nearby while the grass rises, reaching embracing the sunz…
DEBRA YEPA-PAPPAN

Choosing Chicago

I didn’t choose to live in Chicago. My parents made that choice when I was a baby. We moved here after my dad was discharged from the Army. I’m sure we could’ve moved back to his home in New Mexico, Jemez Pueblo, but we came here… for the opportunities: schools, jobs, conveniences. My dad went to trade school to learn culinary arts because that’s what he liked to do. My mom worked at the Chicago Sun-Times as a custodian, because she had minimal education and English was her second language. I’d say my parents adapted to this big city life very easily. My mom loved the fact that everything and anything you need is within reach. She grew up in the countryside of Korea, where there were no stores or hospitals nearby. One of her biggest fears was what you do if you needed immediate medical attention and you were miles and miles away from the nearest hospital? Now she lives only two blocks from one.

I didn’t choose to live in Chicago, but I do choose not to leave. I love my hometown. It’s a big part of who I am. I love it for the opportunities; schools, jobs, conveniences… not just for me, but for my husband and daughter. I call Jemez Pueblo my other home, and what I have there is something Chicago could never offer me. I go there for spiritual recharging, and that is something very important to me. But I would be at an imbalance if I chose Jemez to be my permanent home. My dad’s spirit is there but his essence is here, in Chicago. My mom lives here in Chicago. My husband and daughter live here in Chicago. Chicago is my family.

Downtown Millennium Park

MARIA GUZMAN

Summer Memories

One of my favorite things about Chicago is the lake; I have many childhood memories of taking random drives to the lake with my family. Some of my earliest memories are of walks with my parents along the lakeside on warm summer nights. My sister swears that on one of these occasions she was almost eaten by an opossum-rat the size of a small dog. But she couldn’t be sure what it was because it was well into the evening when we went on that particular walk and only the street lamps and the distant skyline illuminated the trail. On some days we used to makes sandwiches and have a picnic. We would bring old bread along with us to feed the ducks and geese. One time we stopped by Burger King beforehand and swung by the lake to enjoy the day and smell the cool fishy air; my dad decided to stick one of our french fries in a straw we weren’t using to see if a small bird would eat from it. That day every small bird, seagull, duck and goose around our picnic spot feasted like kings. I’m certain if an albatross had been nearby he too would have joined in the festivities. We still have the picture from that moment, taken from the car window by my mom who wanted no part of that escapade. In it you can see my dad’s mischievous and joyful face watching us feed the birds with our straws, while my sister and baby brother and I are determined not to let any bird go hungry. All of us are wearing big toothy grins, and I’m sure even the lake is smiling.
MONICA RICKERT

Living in Chicago

Part I

When I first moved to Chicago my dad told me, “Indians don’t move away from home.” To which I replied, “Well, I’m mostly black.”

The city did take some getting used to at first. I’m from the suburbs and urban living is very different and involves way more people. My dad attempted to get his kids used to bigger city life by means of having us go to different functions around downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I used to go home a lot. I would go to class Monday through Friday then take a train back to Grand Rapids. Mom would tell me to bring an extra bag so I could do all my shopping in Michigan and bring everything back. The sales tax is so much cheaper. I would also go shopping in my mom’s food pantries. She has more than one. At least three. Three fridges and one giant freezer as well. She still has all these things even though it’s just her and my stepdad. Mom just likes to be prepared and have back-ups for everything. She’s a hoarder but she is still willing to give things away. Any time family comes over, she’ll ask if they need anything and to help themselves.

I take after my mom in some ways. I hoard a little and offer guests whatever they may need. Even if I go to visit others, I feel the need to bring them something like food or toilet paper. My mother and father taught me that it’s always better to take care of each other, be it family or friends, because—more often than not—the world won’t.

Part II

When I first visited Chicago for my schooling, my second eldest brother Joel came with. He checked out my school and decided to transfer to my college as well. A few years later, my eldest brother Ryan wanted to live in Chicago too. Our mom and dad always asked when we were moving back to Michigan. To which we’d all reply, “Hopefully never.”

I like that my brothers moved here with me. It’s good to know that some sort of family support system is here. Joel and I get along the best, but Ryan and I buck heads a lot. There’s a phrase we always say to one another: “You have to love me.” Before he moved to LA, we started having family dinners once a week that only included my brothers and me. We would meet at Ryan’s apartment and make some home-cooked meal and watch a bad movie or TV show. It was a great tradition that I wish we had started years before. Ryan’s off across the country now, but Joel and I will still meet once a week for dinner and a bad movie.
Where I choose to live, it would have to be some place I can feel the most relaxed at. Some place where there are lots of trees. I was thinking somewhere out in the country. I like to explore the woods, seeing what animals I can come across, listening to the sound of water running down stream, looking up at the night sky, watching the stars and, if I’m lucky, catching a shooting star fly by. A place where there is a few street lights, no big cities.

How I choose to live would have to stay with my Native roots but not to the point of going overboard. If I had to say, it would probably be how I’m living now.

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I see Indian time in all minorities; just add a Non-Anglo-Saxon ethnicity in front of the word “time.” People who run on “Non-Anglo-Saxon time” have to be aware that they run on it, because there is a limit to being caught on “Non-Anglo-Saxon time” before you are publicly shamed by your peers for being on it. It is a threshold that can have even your “Non-Anglo-Saxon” friends appear at borderline racism: “Man he’s always on Puerto Rican Time!” Speaking from an “Indian time” point of view, the person in question is showing up when they are comfortable, ready to be in attendance. And if they don’t show, well, what does that say about your accommodations?
My friend Lillian owns a Native Indian craft store with a huge teepee in front. Half of her building she used as a museum on our reservation back in M’chigeeng. I love going there each summer. Each visit I get to see my cousin Lucy’s (baa)* crafts. Her leather wedding dress that’s displayed, all made of white deer-hide, is so soft to touch. It smells of newness and fresh outdoorsy. There are rolls and rolls of rabbit fur moccasins quilled on the top and sides, up and down the aisles.

My eyes are so amazed with what my people have made with their two hands. In Lillian’s store there are dozens of quill baskets that are all colors of the rainbow, miles of sweet grass roped on each basket. My Aunt Francis’ (baa) ash laundry basket is the only one left in the world. Elder Mary Ann Migwan’s (baa) braided hair ties, small quilled ash baskets worth tens of thousands of dollars, are in Lillian’s store. I remember my Aunt Stella (baa) made canoes three inches, six inches. She braided them with sweet grass and added a few porcupine quills sparingly. Her braided handmade rugs from rags, free-hand art, in different shapes and sizes were also crafted as special requests along with my uncle Simon’s hand-whittled whistles and sling-shots for fun.

Our whole community had so much talent to share in their craft making. These were special folks who knew how to make smoke houses for smoked fish treated with savory flavors that would melt in your mouth.

I just love visiting Lillian’s museum. Memories of loved ones flow like a river.

*It is an Ojibway tradition to use “baa” after the name of someone who has passed so that they are not called back from the spirit world.
His name was Collie. When my parents brought him home, they rolled him out of a big blanket and he rolled onto the floor. He was black with a thick orange brown golden mane, golden eyebrows and no tail. He was round and chubby and very excited to meet us. Mom and Dad said, “We are going to teach him how to round up the cows.” Collie lived dangerously chasing cars, animals like skunks, porcupines and other dogs. He would come home with porcupine quills all over his face. Each time our Dad would tie him up to a tree and pull the quills with pliers. Yes our Dad was his Rez Doctor. My Dad would say to him in Ojibway, “Why don’t you learn to leave the porcupines alone?” It took days of running through wet morning grass to get the skunk smell out of him. After each wound he would get from his many battles, he recovered miraculously. Mom would say, “Collie knows how to find the right medicine in the woods and fields that will get him well.” Did he recover because of his diet of deer meat and rabbit, or the hard tack cookies the reservation school give away for free to supplement the children’s diet?

Collie was a busy dog. Even in below zero and snow blizzards, he would go back and forth from our house to the school, each time leaving with whomever was ready. He did this in the mornings, at lunch, and afterschool. Plus he watched over our cows. We could count on him to protect us from wolves when we went sleigh riding at night. He would follow us into several hills as we moved to find bigger hills. Collie had no time to be bored. He also liked hunting. When he heard “odawenjigenda,” which means “let’s go hunting,” that made him super happy.

One of the things I never liked was when Collie would howl at night because this meant someone was going to pass away in the community. Ojibways believe the spirits visit you one last time before they leave this earth. That was what my Mom believed and believed that Collie had the spiritual power to know this. “See!” my Mom would say, Collie was howling last night. I was afraid we would get bad news.

My two older sons got to meet Collie when we returned to live on the reservation for a few years. Now there is another generation recalling Collie stories. We had to bury Collie two times because when he died the ground was too frozen to dig, so we buried him in the snow and then in the early spring we buried him again. He was a generous and a loyal Rez dog, he dedicated his whole nineteen years to us.
At the bottom of the hill stood a grayish wood framed house, with the typical slanted gray roof including the chimney. The house included a brown wooden three-step porch just large enough for two people to stand comfortably, awaiting entrance into the house. The home also stood atop larger boulders of equal height so the house was not tipped to any one side. Whether by accident or by purpose, this provided an excellent shelter for the dog. He could lie on the cool ground, in the shade from the hot beating sun or dry from the rain. At two corners of the house stood two barrels that collected rain water, which was used for washing clothes. The rain water made the clothes soft or when you wash your hair with rain water your hair feels so soft. Talking about water made me remember this, or carrying water from the creek for drinking and cooking. But of course I was just a young kid and I remember only the good times or just that was how we lived in the summer months before we returned to boarding school “Tekakwitha Orphanage.”
ANTHONY ROY

Slow Movement

Waiting for retirement is for fools. Does the world suddenly open its true experiences when you worked X amount years? It is this crawl for money/retirement that has us at this accelerated pace to get somewhere that is literally X amount of years from now. I want to enjoy the “right now,” have it being writing in a writing group, discussing books in a book group or movies in a movie podcast.

I personally have acquired more purchased media than I could consume in a decade and yet I yearn for more. Media in this “accelerated society” will be outdated in months, days if not hours. Enjoying the now is what will enlighten our stories of progression and show that you had an opinion.

ROBERT WAPAHII

Originality

Originality is a one-time occurrence. Everything that is currently considered or thought of as original is really a variation of a theme.

One time a people came to a place, stayed a while. Lived in the area, gave words to that place based on sights, sounds, and other factors. The creatures and plants gave a unique, for them, existence and identity and eventually a name for themselves.

Each of us here stems from that evolving. We each think of ourselves as original, but again we are “variations of a theme.”

From a music theory, this is all of our “story.”
MONICA RICKERT  
*Storyteller*

All my life I wanted to be a storyteller. I love stories. I love hearing them. I love reading them. I love watching them unfold. Unfortunately, I get tongue-tied and nervous when I recount my own stories. They never flow the way I want them to. I can’t captivate an audience if I tell a story orally. Writing, however, makes sense to me and keeps me calm. It’s okay if I didn’t get that phrase right or told a detail too soon or too late. I can always go back and edit.

I went to my college because I liked art. I didn’t know much about animation but I was told I could tell my stories and have my pictures move. That sounded perfect. Combine drawing and writing. Too bad I got carpel tunnel from the drawings and big projects required more than one writer who you had to make a lot of compromises with. I still like animation. Maybe one day I’ll get to pursue it further as long as I can tell someone else what to draw.

Over the past several years, I haven’t been able to come up with my own stories and characters nor even flesh out my old ones. Instead, I’ve delved into editing and journalism. With editing I’m able to help others find their voice and convey their stories more clearly. And with journalism I’m able to tell write about others and programs or organizations. I do this for my father’s news website and my job’s newsletter.

I still want to be able to express my own beliefs and style of storytelling. There is a lot to learn from stories. It’s nice to know that there are many different mediums to go about telling them.
DOROTHY ROY
Cardboard boxes

The cardboard box was a necessity in my home on the Reservation. When new boxes arrived at our house they were quickly claimed, the multiple uses of cardboard boxes still amaze me. They were used as an introduction to reading English, we would say the letters out loud and then sound them out and study the advertisement on the box and then an older sibling would confirm what the words mean.

The cardboard box became a heavily used in home item, the top flaps made for grocery list, became a cutting board for scraping fish. We would start many dinners by tearing it up as a fire starter, it became a quick container to get your vegetables from the garden, to pack your lunch, storage for clothing and shoes or as a gift box. Other cardboard box craft ideas included making cutouts for Halloween witches and pumpkins, an easel for art and a poster board for school. It was also great for cardboard pull toys, by just adding rope. Hours of fun could be had by constructing a cardboard house, with custom cutout windows; the cardboard toboggan was also another fun use. I still like this, my sister Roseanne for Christmas fills the cardboard boxes with homemade pickles or cookies.

The funeral wreath would be cut into cardboard circles that doubled for strength and then holes would be punched so that the homemade crepe paper flowers could be secured in place; that’s how the women in the reservation made cardboard wreaths when someone passes away.

The kitchen extension to our log house was somewhere around twenty feet by eighteen feet. The cardboard was neatly wrapped around the exposed two by fours, this was both for insulating and wall papering. After washing the wooden floor the cardboard was cut into floor mats, so the floor would stay clean for a while. My interest in cardboard boxes is still alive. When I was raising my children, I had another chance to bring cardboard boxes in the house they would cut out windows in there boxes and sleep in them. Just visit any home back then, you will be greeted with a cardboard floor mat in the entry way.

MARIA GUZMAN
Home-made

I love home-made gifts. I used to make things for my friends all of the time. Nothing fancy or particularly well done, but each piece had taken time to make and was specifically designed. Tiny rings and key chains made out of salt clay and made myself.

Creating something and giving it away willingly is essentially giving a tiny piece of yourself away. When someone gives you a home-made gift take special care of it. You are holding a piece of their heart, their personally, their thoughts, or even a secret that only they two of you may know.

Home-made presents for friends
The Idle No More Movement

During 2012, the Indigenous nations of Canada were in a political and social unrest with the Canadian government. Sovereignty and environmental rights of the Indigenous peoples were not being upheld and dismissed by proposed parliamentary bills.

On December 10, 2012, the National Day of Action prompted thousands of Indigenous people and supporters around the world to be “Idle No More” and speak out against neo-colonialism through peaceful protests. These included teach-ins, rallies, and flash mobs that spread throughout Canada and America.

Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence vowed a hunger strike until the Canadian government agreed to meet and repair their treaties and relationship with the Indigenous nations. She admitted to be willing to die for this cause. Her hunger strike lasted nearly six weeks with signed commitments from government officials supporting Indigenous issues.

Several of the Chi-Noodin writers have migrated from Canada and this movement directly affected many of their family members.
At first I was against any publicity of this “Idle No More Flash Mob” movement because I know that with the stroke of a pen that Congress can do the same thing here in the US and do away with our reservations and treaties.

If Facebook hadn’t been invented and it probably wouldn’t have known about the hunger strike of Chief Spence; and the Prime Minister of Canada doing away with the Treaty rights of the Anishinaabe in Canada.

After socializing at bingo, which led to socializing with the Kateri Center people and viewing videos on Facebook, I began feeling stronger about Chief Spence’s hunger strike.

As the hunger strike was going on and flash mobs were happening around the world in support of the Chief, I was reading the *Assassination of Hole in the Day*, who was a big leader of the Ojibwe people in the 1860s; and it brought up all the bad feeling of what has happened to Anishinaabe in my own lands. Comparing this to today’s problem in Canada I began to relate more strongly to the cause and realized even more my relationship to the Canadian Ojibwe as well. Ojibwas are a vast tribe and encompass the North American continent, the US and Canada. It’s a huge tribe.

Idle No More brought out the leader roles of women in our Native society. Hole in the Day changed “leadership,” in his day and that it makes me wonder when did women in Ojibwe society start taking on leadership roles.

Chief Spence showed leadership and was able to spark a movement around the entire world, also bringing Natives together by focusing on a particular problem. Bill C-45.

Native sovereignty is being misunderstood by both Native and Non-Natives and is being grossly ignored by the Prime Minister and government of Canada.
CHARLIE ROY
Idle No More

The movement of Idle no More I find amazing. The story goes that four women stared this protest on movement against the Bill C-45. That is worldwide.

I being both Canadian and US citizens and from First Nations. I find it awesome that not only people from the state but around the world are supporting our movement against Bill C-45.

When we had the Idle No More protest in Chicago, I and my family members joined in. We had a nice peaceful protest in downtown Chicago. There were about 300 of us that went. We proved to be part of it. We can only hope that by our showing support and being about change, there can be reconnection to First Nations’ rights.

DOROTHY ROY
Idle No More and Non-Native Media

The non-native media in Canada has their own spin on First Nations people. They shove the microphone into the First Nations chiefs face saying all First Nations chiefs are divided from what Chief Spence wants?

They were asking Chief Shawn. “We came to your First Nations Reserve to find out what’s going on, instead we were marched out by First Nations’ police.”

The reporters wanted quick answers, but Chief Shawn instead talks about the broken relationship between government and First Nations, in not understanding First Nations, because the schools did not teach Native History about our treaties.

Again the reporter says “why can’t I come in here to your reservation and find out what’s really going on. My children need to know also.”

“The work of communication and understanding has to happen first. Then your children and you will understand,” says Chief Shawn.
NORMA ROBERTSON

Sacrifice

I read in a magazine, I can’t remember the man’s name, though I remember what he said in the article. He stated “I don’t agree with Chief Spence’s hunger strike, the Native youth already have a high incidence of suicide.” He had the audacity to compare her sacrifice with the suicidal feeling of loss, hopelessness.

All I recall was this speaker was from Canada, I just thought the comment was odd. Comparing youth suicide to her hunger strike and how possible the hunger strike would convey the message it’s okay to kill yourself as long as the cause is worthy or a just cause. What do you think?

ANTHONY ROY

The Current State of Colonization

“We own you,” said a Native American attendee at the Smithsonian conference on Racist Sports Mascots in Sports, referring to the owner of the NFL team The Redskins’ position on their team mascot. We Native Americans are constantly entrapped in a colonial society, it governs how outsiders view us as a people, it tells us what we should and shouldn’t find offensive and in its present state it erases our past by saying “But I’m an Indian too.”
Not too sure if I could ever get over “it,” if I’m not sure what “it” is, and why would I want to be over it. Being “above” it isn’t dealing with “it.”

I move on daily, but I always revisit, without letting it be the fear of me. This helps me to “build out of the ashes,” sometimes I feel like I’m still helping my grandmothers build up out of the ashes, I hope I do my best and don’t leave too much for the children after me don’t have to burn so much, only when they bend prayers in that good (mino) way.

Always learning from womb to Earth, back to air, rising smoke, conversations help ease the stroke of life. What I learn today I may not fully understand, nor over-stand, until the next revisit, when the spark ignites my thought and touches my heart. Inspirations, on our way to “recovery.” Recovering our fullness, our families. Getting God, Allah, Creator, Gitchi Monidu out of His Hostage situation.

Full understanding of self, true to our environment and others, enlightenment, truly lightens the load…

Excerpt from the Bricolage Indian Land Dancing Mural
Josie Dykas

Building Up Out of the Ashes

Growing up, there was this house next door that repeatedly had foundational problems. The foundation of the house was corrupt, it kept buckling. Dave, the owner of the house, put every dime he had into saving the house….. thousands of dollars in metal beams to try to alleviate the cement foundation from the weight of the house because the cement was cracking and buckling. After putting all that money in the house, Dave passed away. His children tried to sell the house, they didn’t get half of the money he invested not even counting the current value of the house. They barely got enough to cover funeral costs.

This reminds me think of our current government structure. It was built on a corrupt foundation, tricking Natives, enslaving Africans, etc…. and for the past 200 years we have been building a house on this corrupt foundation. No matter how beautiful and structurally sound the house might be, it was built on a corrupt foundation. What happens with corrupt foundation?.... What will we do after?

Georgina Roy

No Words

While we were on vacation back on First Nations Reservation, we attended a traditional funeral. At the wake service my sister and I sang songs in English and Ojibway with the community. I visited the many family members of the deceased brother. His sisters were some of my old grade school friends. His wife was totally deaf. He was not an educated man but he had a lot of bush knowledge. He also learned how to sign after understanding that his wife was totally deaf. He was a lumberjack, and shared his earnings with all his family. Each family member felt they were special because of the personal time they had with him.

I met his wife for the first time at the wake. She had a signer who translated in the most gentle way, telling of his presence on earth, and how this man was so important to the family. At the wake services, as each person talked about his life, this amazing young lady translated by doing a dance with her hands. Her whole body did all the motions telling this story of a loving father, brother, uncle, grandfather, friend and husband. I was so impressed I could not stop looking at her. So did everyone else. While she signed the scripture chosen that day, and how he was promised to join the Creator, her hands did a staircase dance to heaven. This was the most beautiful part that stood out for me. The whole congregation watched his wife and family begin to heal through this young lady’s talent. With no words she signed with passion. We witnessed many group hugs of and the appreciation was felt by all.
DEBRA YEPA-PAPPAN  
My Dad, the Cook

My dad wasn’t a chef. He was a cook. He worked the broiler, so his job was to cook meats. He worked in upscale hotel restaurants and loved his job. His schedule was set so that he worked at nights. He would take me to school every morning, all through elementary and high school, and he would leave for work in the afternoon while I was still in school. Occasionally, I would see him during lunch when he volunteered to work in the school kitchen. My mom and I had dinner on our own for many years. My dad would come home late at night after I had gone to bed. When I saw him in the morning, I’d hear about how the night went. “Oh, they kicked my butt!” he would say, which meant it was a really busy night. He’d go on to complain about the bad server who messed up, or a fellow line cook who didn’t know what he was doing. My dad took his work seriously. He was proud of the way he cooked the meats. He would cook them perfectly without fail, knowing how they were cooked just by the touch. He was always complemented on his cooking. When he worked at the Park Hyatt downtown, Yul Brenner would stay in the penthouse whenever he was in town to perform in “The King and I.” He would only ask for my dad to cook his steak because my dad made it perfectly for him every time.

My dad worked in the kitchen for nearly thirty years. He was the best at everything that needed to be done. Even when my dad had cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy, he didn’t stop working. As tired as he was, he still worked hard, still complained about getting his butt kicked, but was always happy and proud that he did his very best.

Francis “Frank” Yepa

Francis “Frank” Yepa
GEORGINA ROY

Kleenex Blanket

My whole family always had a hankering to one day have a small business. My nephew Charlie’s friend Lloyd worked for a Mexican Restaurant. In 2010, the owner offered us the opportunity to take over his restaurant every Monday night to serve the community. We called it the Three Sisters First Nation Restaurant.

So when our mother Virginia (baa) visited Chicago for the last time back in the summer of 2010, we were so busy with the Three Sisters First Nation Restaurant. Into the wee hours of the nights we went shopping, planned the menu, prepared native cuisine, scheduled entertainment, and hired staff for the evenings. So there was little time for mother. But I made sure she was comfortable. I ordered a special hospital bed, and a port-a-potty place right in my living room. This became her instant bedroom and visiting quarters. She was surrounded with her favorite things and endless family members of all ages, always by her bedside.

I was always the last one to tuck her in for the night. She shared many stories. She asked how the day went, if we had a lot of folks come and if we made money. She said, “I’m so proud of my daughters and your work during the day.” I made sure she had her snacks, water, juice, and a box of Kleenex. Our mother was a great seamstress. She made all our clothing: dresses, suits for my dad, and Ojibwa designed regalia for my brothers. She knitted sweaters with free hand patterns of forestry and animal backgrounds, winter mitts from shrunk, faded sweaters, and she made from recycled clothing warm wooly blankets for each of us when we were children.

Late into the night I would sneak up to check her out. She had the whole box of Kleenex all spread out on her bed. I said to her, “Mom, what are you doing?” She said, “I’m making a blanket. Can you pick them up for me and slowly follow the pattern? I’m too tired to do it.” “Okay, mom. Sleep. I’ll take care of your blanket.” Our mother had Alzheimer’s and complications from diabetes. When Mom returned to Canada, during her last days and hours she continued to make her Kleenex blankets. My sister Roseanne was always there to pick them up.

Menu from the Three Sisters First Nation Restaurant

It is an Ojibway tradition to use “baa” after the name of someone who has passed so that they are not called back from the spirit world.
Acknowledgements

St. Kateri Center  
Georgina Roy, Director

Title VII  
Jolene Aleck, Program Manager  
Design by  
Monica Rickert, Cultural Resource Specialist

Community Writing Project  
College of Education UIC  
Janise Hurtig, Coordinator

Special Thanks  
All the writers who generously shared their own pictures

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Chi-Noodin

“Big Wind”

Chicago Title VII American Indian Education Program
The Kateri Center of Chicago
UIC Community Writers Project

Printed by:
K & M Printing