



*Gatherings VIII*

Shaking the Belly  
Releasing the Sacred Clown

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## Gatherings

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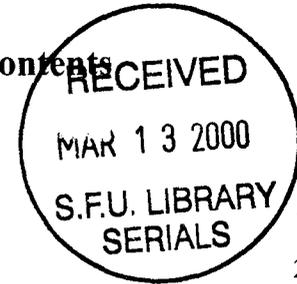
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## Introduction

### WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF LAUGHTER

There are complex categories of indigenous humour. There is a type of humour that only Elders can share. There is a type of humour which belongs in women-talk, man-talk, children-talk, and of course, Trickster-talk. There is Rez humour. Then, there's the humour which celebrates our survival, our triumphs over history. There is humour in clowns. And all this humour is no less than sacred. The *A Priori* statement upon which this is based is that We are sacred. As Lame Deer put it,

“We Sioux spend a lot of time thinking about everyday things which in our mind are mixed up with the spiritual. We see in the world around us many symbols that teach us the meaning of life. We Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one. To us (symbols) are part of nature, part of ourselves, even little insects like ants and grasshoppers. We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and we need no more than a hint to give us the meaning,”

*(Lame Deer 1972, 109)*

as in the Longhouse experience where clowns play a part in ceremony, so we, in our everyday experience, need to accept the clown, play, celebrate and laugh.

JB

### Gathering Thoughts

My brothers used to come up from the reserve for weekend visits when I lived in Toronto. My partner and I are calm people and so is our home. They took over our house, oh yeah, that gramma oak dinner table shook with laughter – ours and a lot of her own. That table loved the elbows resting on her back, the bellies pressed against her sides. She's a round thing and the laughter whirled around her edges; it kept swirling until the pork chops were bones or somebody choked on a potato (then we laughed harder.) All that laughter born and raised on the reserve came uptown and blew the smog from the city and I felt at home.

Then I came to En'owkin. Try keeping a straight face around here.

I sense a theme.

Before I began sifting through the pages and pages of submissions, I expected to laugh. Yeah, I did. But as I read the stories and poems they reminded me that our masks aren't just spiritually powerful, they're beautiful. As I read them I remembered that our dances aren't just beautiful, they're spiritually powerful.

Like all of our contemporary art our stories are never 'one thing.' Among the works you'll find here are very few laughs just for the sake of laughing. In each of the pieces lives a teacher; there is hurt, there is thought, there is culture, colonization, spirituality and on and on. Some are introspective, others gaze on the big broad world but none of them are 'just funny.'

This made the task of dividing chosen pieces into thematic sections very difficult. Nearly each piece deserved it's own section. There were works that were hurt when placed in one section – they became limited and restrained. These stories got up and jumped into another part of the book and are quite happy there. There were other works that stood proud on their own but when placed in a section opened up – they grew in interpretation and through context. There were a great number that, like much Native literature, defied, even actively resisted being placed in one category. These stories had no defining characteristic but could encompass colonization, celebration, trickster and more. We did the best we could. The trickster stories however, were alive and very much comfortable in their role as trickster stories. They fit together all cozy, all carrying that trickster medicine either high on their heads or strapped to their backs (butts in some cases) but each carried it in one way or another. They, of course, appear first in the anthology.

I sensed the presence of the trickster in the production of this anthology. (Who's idea for a theme was this anyway?) After a few hours of proof-reading, every word looks wrong.

But here we all are. Ny:weh and a big hug to: Marlena Dolan; the editorial committee – Jeannette Armstrong, William George and Graham Angus; Regina Gabriel; all the authors who sent work in; Anna Sewell – she knows why; and finally to my mentor, advisor, co-editor, sometimes boss and always friend, JB Joe.

Welcome to *Shaking the Belly - Releasing the Sacred Clown Within*. Or, for those of you who are dyslexic (tricky, huh?) like me, welcome to releasing the belly - shaking the sacred clown within. Enjoy!

Susan M. Beaver

# Trickster

## **Once More With Love!**

He's just a wily old rub-you-the-wrong-way, big pawed, sorry looking yet somehow kind of magnetic Coyote, even at his most pitifullest! The most aggravating kind, hey, that's just the way coyotes are. Now, you can get offended with him if you want. He probably intended it. He just loves it when you fume, you see! In fact, when you don't fume and you throw his foolishness back to him instead, with a big old grin yourself and a flick of your hips and a swing of your hair, you'll make him really mad. But while he's telling you off, yelling that you're the cause of all his woes, and calling you a goddamned woman, and going on about how no one does things right anymore, least of all some snippity woman, and if he starts commenting on your appearance, and how you're not as pretty or as young as you used to be, and how he's a man, and he has physical needs, and what's your problem anyway, then you know you've got him, if nothing else for a second or two. And all the while he's going off on you, he knows you've got him, too, because he's a real good listener, and while his mouth is flapping away with a mind of its own, he's leaning up against the wall of his own brain checking himself out and kicking himself for falling for his own trick. But he's intrigued, too, because he was expecting a predictable and boring win, and now he's got a fight on his hands, and in that moment you're anything but unattractive. In that moment he wants you, he wants you bad.

## Coyote Makes New Colours

I'm gonna tell you a little story, cuz I ran into Coyote just now. I'll tell ya, when I first got here Coyote was laughing so hard, he was rolling around on the ground. I said "Coyote what are you laughing at?... What's so funny? Hey... wait a minute...what'd ya do Coyote?"

He laughed and laughed until I started laughing too. Next thing I knew we were both rolling around on the ground laughing. My eyes were all tearing up and my nose was all running. Then I remembered... "Oh ya," and I stopped laughing, "What'd ya do Coyote?"

He told me. He said, "Well you ever notice about them flowers? There are a lot of flowers around but mostly just white ones, blue ones, and red ones." Coyote noticed there were no green, or orange, or yellow flowers.

*"ya, no yellow or orange or..."*

*"I know Coyote, I'm telling the story now okay."*

So, Coyote was taking a pee on a blue flower bush, and he noticed them flowers turned green.

*"ya, ever nice that green one."*

*"Shhh."*

"Well isn't that perty" Coyote said, "I think I'll try that again," So he went around and peed on the red ones and they turned orange.

*"I didn't say perty, I said per-it-ty, like the proper way."*

"My that's awful nice," he said admiring the orange ones.

When he got to a white bush and made a pee, he heard a girl coming along the path. He recognized the voice, cuz she wuz talking and laughing to herself.

"It's one of those Wabegijig girls, I think I'll hide behind this here bush," and he did.

*"Ya I'm ever good at hiding. I just put my tail between my legs like this and..."*

*"Coyote shhh! If you don't be quiet I'm going to have to start all over."*

*"Okay, okay, jeez."*

"Wow look at those nice yellow flowers!" she said and picked one up.

*"He-he-he-he-heee."*

She held it to her nose and sniffed and sniffed. She just loved the smell of that flower.

*"Ha-ha-ha-ha-haaaaha."*

Well that girl, she wandered off with that flower to her nose, talking and laughing to herself, oh but by then Coyote was laughin' a lot harder.

That's when I came along. He was laughing and told me that story, then he said to me, "That Wabegijig, she liked that smell so much, I bet her ancestors long time from now will still be smellin them flowers, just like she is."

"You're probably right my friend," I said, "You're probably right."

That's the story. It's finished now.

*"Finished? I didn't even get to say anything. Oh well. That girl she sure likes my smell eh?... Maybe that little Wabegijig girl, maybe she wants to be my wife eh? ... he-he-he-ha-ha.... Funny two-legged creatures you ones... I don't smell your pee.... I did a nice job of them colors though...especially that yellow eh...don't you think?... ..hey, are you still listening?... hey!... Where's everybody going?..."*

## He's At it Again

It was at Returning the Gift that I heard of him. Oh he was present at many socials and many many classes while I was living in Penticton. But it was this special trip that he really showed himself. He must have been rooming at the same hotel that I did. He got a hold of the switchboard somehow and he fixed it so my phone would ring every half hour from 11:30 at night till 8:00 am the next day. Seems he wanted to make sure I knew that there was a phone message for me.

He then must have gone to Vancouver. I never saw him around but I felt his presence. He must have sat on the runway in Vancouver because my plane that was supposed to leave at 1:00 pm on Monday never got to Kelowna until 3:45 that afternoon. He must have had some chuckles too, because when he got that plane to Kelowna, it was what you call raining cats and dogs. I heard someone say, "when you run for the plane make sure you watch out for the poodles," so I knew.

Now I thought that he resided in the west. I figured that when I got home to Ontario and then on to Buffalo, to go back to school, I could leave him in the Okanagan. NOT!! He followed me again. After my return from Penticton and Kelowna and I'm happily back at my studies, I get a letter from the financial aid office. Now this isn't too bad for some people, but this makes the third one since school started, and by now, they are getting a little testy. I go traipsing over to the financial aid office to see what can be done and there he sits on top of the computer. Because he is sitting there eating his lunch the financial aid officer cannot pull up my records. I'm to come back the next day.

Okay. Now it is the next day and I'm back at the financial aid office. This form has been sent and re-sent at least three times and it needs to be corrected again. Something about illegal alien on the paperwork. Hmmm! Now I see him in the corner chuckling and I'm just about in tears. The load is getting too heavy. I finally find out from the office that if I go to south campus and meet with Mr. Soandso then maybe he can straighten things out. Off to south campus and make an appointment with The Man. For next week. Oh well I've been at this for two and a half months now. What's another week.

In the meantime I get another letter from a different office where I am registered for a Special Major. More paperwork because the University has not accepted the two English courses that I took at the En'owkin and

because Canada is a foreign country, my two year certificate is not accepted. What to do? Do the paperwork, write the letters and the proposals all over again and take the required extra courses.

Well, now the proposals and letters are done for the special majors and I'm scheduled to take the extra courses in order to graduate. Now what? Yep, the financial aid office wants to talk with me again. Well, this time it's the meeting with The Man and he has written a letter that changes my status from foreign student to NY state resident. That settles it. I'm now down to only owing about \$5,000.00 from the \$17,000.00 they quoted me in September. Okay, where is he? He's not there. He's gone? I hope so. Has he gone back to Penticton?

Nope. He's baa-aa-ck. I make the dean's list in the fall semester. My marks are in the A's and B plus area and spring semester. I'm expecting to graduate with honours. Nope. Guess who is there at the records and registration office waving my transcript around and laughing? He is doing somersaults when the lady tells me that the A's and B pluses from the En'owkin transcript does not count because it is a foreign school. According to them I'm a good student, but not good enough, according to their records. Then too there is the three awards I'm recommended for. Yep he is waving the awards and throwing them up in the air where they land at the feet of someone else. The dean says I haven't been at this school long enough to get the Arts and Letters award for outstanding students. I've only been here for one year. Okay I can live with that. I get the Art award and he is there with a smirk on his face. Oh well, I'm proud of that and he can't take that away from me now.

Graduation is over. I got my BA and registered and accepted for the Masters program. I'm on my way. Summer job of writing and researching Iroquois History—just what I wanted and my arm is giving me trouble. Hard to use the computer. Hmmm, could it be? Yep, I go to the school medical office and guess who is sitting at the reception desk? He takes my history and sends me to physical therapy. I played football as a kid, and now it acts up. The arm is still sore, but I won't let him win. I feel him every now and then, jabbing me in the arm, and I just get up and leave the area.

The book signing has been going well. Every little bit counts and on Sunday I'm on my way to Rochester, NY, to do a signing and reading at Borders Books. I'm riding the bus and while we are parked at the stop in Batavia, this young man gets out of his girlfriend's car to get on the bus. The bus driver is having a smoke and I'm reading my book. I hear a bang and look up. There is the little blue car and a sign post rattling and kind of lean-

ing over. He is really dancing up a storm and hootin' and hollerin' over there near the car. That young girl was trying to drive out of the parking lot and was watching her young man now sitting on the bus when she ran into the (handicapped parking only sign). Now there was perfect example of "love is blind."

Yep, I've come to see that He – Coyote travels far and wide. I'm looking around for him but he is no where to be seen. I think he is back in Penticton because I faxed two stories to Theytus in May and apparently they don't have them. He must have taken them and put them in the circular file or on someone's desk. Well, I hope he stays there for a while, I'd like to hear how he acts in someone else's territory.

## two tricky guys

raven and coyote swinging around the clubs  
at night, jigging away, swinging by cafes,  
doing their dubs of poetry,  
i pray they didn't change anything ...  
like they usually do  
but when they're together,  
that raven and coyote ...  
you never know.

raven and coyote up to their old tricks  
on the west coast, boasting and toasting  
clinking their glasses on new year's day.  
i fear they're making plans for us humans  
but, i am convinced there's gotta be a lesson  
and teaching in all what they do  
even if it's sure to be a mistake ...  
which is it likely to be ...

i saw raven and coyote  
one time at a pow wow  
dancing with crow doing the hop  
when coyote sneaks in a karate chop  
with flips and dips, enticing crow  
making her caw as she was freaking then falling  
down at coyote's paw and he sure did blush  
at the sight of crow's skirt up over her head  
coyote said with a bow, i am honoured crow  
but let's take it slow. you're just too fast for me!  
and i think to myself, that sly coyote  
so smooth, so slick, trying to trick crow ...  
'cause we all know he's just too fast for any of us!

cheers to raven and coyote  
who make us laugh and listen  
perk your ears to hear their stories,  
and keep close to mother earth  
but watch your back for those two tricky guys  
in their furry suit and ties ... 'cause you never know  
what is next with those freaky sneaks!

## Nanabush and the Mud Ducks

This is a story without an end. Every story about Nanabush is like this. The stories connect like paths, roads, and highways. If you lay on a cloud looking down you'd see earth etched with well travelled lines, each a meandering trail in a different direction. Each eventually guided to the other. Nanabush stories are this—an extension of the last. Nanabush's life. Nanabush's story.

The legend of Nanabush and the Mud Ducks is like this. It begins at the end of one valley and the start of another. A valley of soft rolling hills and a long meandering river. A valley populated by birch and bushes hidden in the back country far from villages. Nanabush always came back this way from the high country. Wild sweet berries, fresh big fish and young mud ducks filled the valley with plenty to eat. His trip to the high country had been miserable. It had been so cold that his words froze when he spoke. It was a barren place where he had to eat his words, even the ones he didn't like. For the trip home, Nanabush had shoved some words in his pockets. He thought himself clever because he knew he'd reuse these words, so he wouldn't repeat himself (which he was known to do). The frozen words weighed heavy and tired him. The weight made his legs work hard which made his stomach grumble for more fuel to keep walking. His stomach rumbled like rolling thunder and the ice words clanked and collided like tiny light sparks. Nanabush couldn't concentrate while he walked. The battles in his stomach and pockets bothered him. Busy rubbing his stomach and patting his pockets, he didn't see the tree root he tripped on. Ice words flew from his pockets. Flew out and up. Each a whisper as it hit the air but soon the afternoon breeze and sun melted the frozen chunks of words. The clanking and colliding in the pockets had chipped and cracked some words. Pieces of Nanabush's northern chatter and babble bounced off nearby rocks, roots, bark, and branches and took flight towards the sky.

Nanabush heard days of conversation battling for the same air time. Each piece of gibberish rose in volume. "Ook a al te no. Balahh. Tweeken saw a rabble keek jon ree. Amazonitoid liquid etchem ook ook bandaball sen sojourn hannal notchal. EEECH! EETCH! EEK! EEK!"

Frantically running around, Nanabush scrambled to collect his jabbering voices, shoving what annoying words he caught in his mouth. Between gulps and grabs, he yelled at them "Shhh!" But the words' volume increased. The noise got so loud it woke the mud ducks sleeping on the river

bank."What! What!" each cried as it rose to flight.

"What! What! What! What!" The leads circled in search. Nanabush quickly ran to hide amongst the willow bushes. "Food," he thought. "Succulent. Mud duck food. My favourite meal."

The ducks continued to search for the sounds. Flying into the heat of the conversations, words bounced off their wings and backs hitting each other. The leads noticed and warned the others, "Go! Go! Go! Go!"

Nanabush, fearing his meal would leave, jumped from behind the bush. "Neeshtows, I hear your frantic quacking. What's wrong?"

"It's Nanabush! It's a trick! Go! Go! Go! Go!" squawked the leads.

The fluttering of the wings and the warmth of the afternoon sun had lessened the volume of Nanabush's many voices. Only dribblings of conversations could be heard. "Wait!" he cried to the fleeing ducks, "I can quiet the voices and make them go away." With that he scooped up the last of the falling words, which were reduced to burps and gurgles, and shoved them in his mouth.

Licking his fingers and lips he said, "I came to this valley from the high country. My friends up there said I would become filled with words and song when I visited here. They spoke truth. I am so fulfilled and in awe of this beautiful valley, I am speechless." With that he sat down on a nearby log.

The ducks, still confused from the now silenced noise and sudden appearance of Nanabush, cried, "It's a Nanabush trick! Go! Go! Go! Go!"

Nanabush continued to sit quietly on the log. Calmly he said, "I do not want to frighten you, my friends. I only want to sit by the water and watch you dip and swim. It's been a long time since I have been with friends."

"No! No! You lie. You want to eat us. We know you Nanabush. You are always hungry."

"You misunderstand me. I have just eaten and I am no longer hungry. Believe me, I want to be among friends. I miss my friends from the high country. We would laugh and sing. We'd dance all day because there is no night. Life in the high country is a party, and the people are hospitable. For weeks we laughed, sang, danced, and ate. I am so full of food I will not eat until next year. I wouldn't eat my high country friends; otherwise, when I returned nobody would be there to greet me."

"He speaks truth," spoke one brave duck. "I've heard high country people live like that." His words were enough to calm the other ducks because ducks believe each other. They believed this so much that they flew back to the river bank to settle down.

Nanabush smiled to himself and watched them. He began to sing. He stood up and danced and sang. "Aiy. Aiy. Aiyawah. Aiyawah." He banged dry broken branches to his beat and danced close to the river bank but away from the ducks so as not to scare them again.

The ducks watched, both cautious and curious, as Nanabush singing and dancing, raised his arms to the sun. Some moved in for a closer look while others swam a little way out on the river to watch.

Nanabush called to them. "Join me. I will teach you a new version of the friendship dance that I learned up north."

The braver ducks were eager to learn and came closer to Nanabush. The others honked and squawked in protest.

"It's safe. Come dance with us. We'll party and celebrate this day Nanabush refused to eat us," cheered the eager ducks.

"Don't be frightened. I will protect you from predators," said Nanabush most charmingly.

Anxious to dance, the ducks quickly waddled to where Nanabush was dancing. Each duck copied Nanabush's dance. Noticing, Nanabush said, "Oh! My little friends, you are all dancing the same. Dance uniquely." This was difficult to do, since ducks follow each other exactly. Nanabush kept singing and dancing, encouraging the others to join. Finally, all the laughter and gaiety persuaded the others to join.

Nanabush, thrilled his plan worked, cheered, "I am happy, my friends. We are together. Now to learn the friendship dance! Close your eyes. You must not look at each other. Your dance is to be unique. Remember all the lands you travelled over. All the different animals and people you saw. Remember what you saw in those lands. Remember the music. Put it in your heart. Dance from there. And when you dance, SING. Sing loud. The louder the better. I want to hear the joy in your stamping and shouting. We are new friends. Let's share in the joy of our friendship!"

His words made those ducks dance. They danced thunderously. They danced differently. They danced with abandon. Those ducks danced, heads held high, honking, flapping, smashing into each other, all laughing, but never stopping. Nanabush anxiously watched. He followed behind the ducks and imitated their dancing. Putting down his banging sticks, he sang louder.

"Sing. Dance. Keep the sun awake so it does not sleep tonight. Sing as loud and as strange you can. Today is not a day to be a duck, it's a day to be a dancer. Dance and I will choose the best!"

The dancing became wild and furious. Each duck trying to out do the

other. Nanabush encouraged them more. Their rhythm became tumultuous. Waves of honking and quacking. Some quacks were so strange and unusual that one little duck wanted to do the same to win Nanabush's affection. She waited until she heard another. Peeking to catch a glimpse, she saw Nanabush grab a duck by its neck, crack it and throw it behind the log.

"Fly! Fly!" she shrieked. "Nanabush tricked us. He's cracking necks as we dance foolishly! Go! Go!" The ducks opened their eyes and saw Nanabush choking another one of their friends. They took flight in fear. Nanabush threw down the duck and chased the squealer. "When I catch you, I will turn your eyes as red as my anger."

Just as she was about to take flight, he stamped on her back, pinning her down. The weight of his foot dented her back. Her legs pushed from underneath and became squeezed to her sides pointed backwards. She winced in pain.

Nanabush didn't care that he had altered the look of the little duck, which would affect all future mud ducks. He was too furious to care. He had planned a meal of many but only had a few. Impatient to do the little duck in, he reached down to crack her neck. When Nanabush went to make the quick jerk, she shifted and he got hold of his moccasin and yanked. Falling backwards, he propelled the duck into the air.

Angry and disappointed his clever plan had backfired, Nanabush watched the little wounded duck fly to freedom. "You are lucky, my friend. Yes, very lucky."

Tired from the day's events, Nanabush went back to the log to clean his catches. Off in the lazy afternoon horizon, Nanabush heard the din of bawling ducks. Too weary to care, he decided he'd eat after a sleep. Constructing an outlandishly large fire, he curled up and nestled his butt close to the roaring flames. So close that this is the beginning of another story.

## Napi jumps into the TV to visit “North of Sixty”

Last night Napi dropped by  
climbed through my living room window  
with a towel wrapped around his waist  
water dripped off his body  
as if he just had a shower

I was stretched out on my Indian design  
love seat  
watching *North of Sixty*  
on my big screen TV

Napi came and sat on my legs  
I said, “get off my legs Napi  
you have a bony bum and I’m watching *North of Sixty*,”  
Napi laughed at me

Napi pointed up  
at the drywall ceiling  
fat black and brown fury  
spiders danced up there upside down  
as Napi sang,

“Oh my little spiders  
dance dance for this girl  
dance til she can’t see me  
make love to her  
Wa ha Wa ha ho!”

I said, “Oh Holy grandfather  
Oh Napi Old One  
Get out of the way  
I’m watching *North of Sixty*.”

Again Napi pointed up at the furry spiders  
and now they fell down on my pink rug  
and spun themselves into snakes

snakes twisting slapping on my pink rug  
as Napi sang,

“Oh my little children  
spit your poison at this lady  
So I can slither my tongue into her mouth!  
Wa ha Wa ha ho!”

I said, “Oh Holy Grandfather  
Oh Napi Old One  
Get out of the way  
I’m watching *North of Sixty*  
you’re bugging me Holy Grandfather,  
this show only comes on once a week!”

Napi laughed at me  
Get up off my legs and  
pointed his index finger  
towards the snakes twisting  
slapping on my pink rug  
and they were gone

Napi sat down beside me on my Indian design love seat  
and watched *North of Sixty*  
on my big screen TV with me  
On ‘North of Sixty’ the bootlegger was  
running for chief

I said, “Go on, Holy Grandfather you have many  
wrinkles on your chest... go and cover yourself up!  
I’m trying to watch this show!”

Napi got up off my love seat  
his face was red as fire  
and he pointed his index finger  
at my big screen TV and sang,

“Oh TV oh *North of Sixty*  
help me to make this lady love me

Wa ha Wa ha ho!"

Then Napi crawled into my big screen TV  
he was in *North of Sixty's* band-office  
with the people electing a chief

Then all hell broke loose as Napi created chaos  
The bootlegger won then  
the TV camera was spinning low showing everyone's bum  
lights flickered on and off in the band-office while  
Napi jumped around on top of tables  
then he grabbed Tina, the cop's gun!  
Bang! Bang! the gun shot off into the air  
as all the actors scrambled to pretend  
with fear on their faces  
Napi then farted in all their faces

From the background of the *North of Sixty* set  
Napi blew me a kiss and said  
"you I will never forget!"  
as I jumped up from Indian design love seat  
and turned off my TV set.

## Feminist/Mother/Woman

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**Poem of 29 Lines**  
**Series - 01**

went to a meeting the other night over  
heard these found lines  
you know someday i'd like to be a type of stereo  
i'm effin mad yeah sick and tired of taping by butts  
to make one whole cigarette in the early  
early morning so what that's not the worst  
the worst yet is tying one on while the guy  
ties up his arm with a piece of rubber  
and that's not all you're laying  
there legs apart ready  
yeah well a guy's gotta do what he's gotta do right  
what about the times i slept  
naked on a cold sidewalk dreaming endlessly  
of cold cuts penthouse roof tops balloons party hats  
and dressed up balloons grinning from here  
to maternity well  
if it gets right down to it i'd prefer  
to be at a home game with my own my very own  
band playing my song yeah yeah a song i wrote it  
never ends there what we need is a bottle  
of sperm containing enough for us to live  
smatter cat for your tongue oh for effsake let's cut  
the crap if we were at all serious  
we would march right outta here join the marches down south  
at the fruit stands no no no i'm not gay  
shut up your ignorant  
mouth witch let's hold these pent up emotions in check  
i hear there's a pretty good show at the odeon or somewhere  
wanna go?

## when i'm not there

sun lit spotlight  
through the kitchen window  
my sister's light brown skin  
soap suds climbed up her arms  
    a thimble full of clouds  
on her forehead  
where she nudged  
a strand of black hair from her eyes  
i watched  
as she gently  
rubbed  
my cup  
in the steaming water

and told me the story  
of seeing her sister for the first time  
how her smile flowed  
from her eyes  
how she had no four year old words  
she told me the story  
of seeing her sister for the first time  
how her smile flowed  
from her eyes  
because  
she had no four year old words  
to tell her mother  
how much this sister  
resembled  
her picture of Creator

as my sister stands in the sunlight  
streaming words and song and laughter  
i catch them in my breath  
press them in a book  
deep in my chest  
and when i can't see her  
when i'm not there  
when she's back home  
i pull out this book  
and flip through the sound of her voice  
and the sunlight  
streams  
again

## Daughter

The fluttering instructor made her way about the room and chattered and laughed and appeared to have other things on her mind.

The instructor-aid, feeling no responsibility, sat there and observed the panels of the room with genuine interest.

The token white male came into the room and assumed it was his duty to determine the ease and comfort of all. Some Mothers empower their male children so.

Am I angry? Here we all are. None of us want to be here. An education system that is competitive, labeling and degrading is the reason we have trekked here.

First, we need to design an education plan. Since my daughter has reached the high school level and has been registered into a work orientation program rather than the regular program we need to decide the fitting strategy. They followed my series of questions and queries with an adamant statement of "I want her to WANT to come to school." Oh we party here, yes, we do that. That is not what I meant! That was such a lame attempt at closing the gap, reaching the teen, developing a bond. She did not even give warning, just withdrew. What I mean is I want her to WANT to come to school, I want her to want to learn.

Then my heart said: "Would you teach her that the reason some communication is so difficult is because we don't understand that we are all individuals? Would you tell her that understanding herself is so necessary before she can understand others? Would you instill in her the drive for knowledge? Would you explain that the horrible sound of the band practice from the other parts of the school ground turns out to be beautiful music? Would you give her appreciation for art and music? I don't know about that opera stuff. Would you tell her how important she is to her family?"

When I did focus with my ears again, the words were still coming out of the man at work. The end of the year they go on a week long camping trip and they have a lot to do during the school year. Like a visit to the museum, swimming, and the usual field trip hoop la. We have been out and about the United States and Canada camping. My daughter is too young to enter the Lifeguard Program and she did complete all requirements for this. All ready it's all wrong, I can read her face. I realize that this is to improve social skills and to develop other skills that are still unclear to me.

So, how is it we are here? Why can't we just have a twenty four hour teacher? How can I help her with this? Why is this program still here? It is so outdated. I should have stayed in school. Attention, direct looks and questions were so difficult for her to receive. She would not describe her likes

and dislikes. (I must tell her everyday how much I love her.) Why is her self-esteem so negative? I really shouldn't be such a domineering, mouthy, know-it-all!

We, the parents, are having our patience tested, dignity removed, unknowingly on her part, and dreams being cut and on the floor. It is because I don't know how to do all of the above. Well, I do, but I am too busy feeding my own ego and doing the daily survival. Somehow things are out of kilter. I had this huge assumption that parental skills became easier.

The parental skills that I did have were of forced behaviour, not ever explaining in detail the imposition of this. Anger was my favourite form of talk. (One way.) I speak in the past tense because I have left that and am now in a mode of search. You notice when I discuss parents, it has turned to "I." The father of this scenario is present and is one of great importance to us all. He does not speak with empathy... I thought my form was bad. His is too cutting and blunt at the same time. Get it?

Back to my daughter who is beautiful inside and simply gorgeous outside, she can so easily fool you because she can dress to perfection. She can create a masterpiece with her hair. It appears that all is well. The testing has proven that she cannot read, therefore she can't spell, which also leads to difficulty with comprehension. I believe that she has not come to harm because she is so caring for others and always says so.

She posed this statement or question: Why do boys get to do whatever they want and go out and be asked and told okay, but when she wants to go out it becomes a court session and then a panic. It is not fair.

Now here is where I lose it. This one, the youngest of four, questions my pompous authority. She challenges and scrutinizes me and is "dismayed" at me. Marriage is not something for her and children are sweet. Nevertheless, they are tiresome and too much of your own time is dedicated to them. I hope that this is not the message that she receives from me! She laughingly questions, how can you look at the same face everyday and do the same things everyday and clean and cook and do laundry? For her, crowds are preferable, seeing different people everyday and no housework. Lately, what I should have said has become routine. Yet time still goes by and words are left dangling, unsaid.

So, you see, we do need your help. We, meaning ALL of us. Most of all, I want her to want to learn, to get over the trivial details, such as popularity. I want her to make her own path.

## Don't Burst the Bubble

Outside with his Daddy  
 he runs back  
 the soap solution in his hand  
 because he thinks I am the magic.  
 Only Mommy  
 can throw round rainbows in the air  
 cover the grass with glass bulbs  
 only Mommy  
 can tickle beauty from her lips  
 coax it through the wand  
 until it multiplies and rushes out  
 translucent  
 only Mommy  
 can blow bubbles  
 that tease his chase  
 floating fleeing  
 popping at his touch.  
 He thinks the magic is me.  
 Please don't tell him  
 it's really Fisher Price.

## Untitled

at school they told her she was mad  
is what the auntys say  
it's true she was tired  
so tired she starts with writing in her sleep  
that was one cold spring that one  
eyes open and opening her eyes  
wider she can see now  
over to the left and all in rows  
of smiling faces  
teachers drill and stuffing  
in their eyes  
they all hold sticks or pointers magic wands  
high above their heads  
and speak together one by one in unison  
of pains inside their paunches  
crooked lies  
best summer she ever had that old lady  
comes right on in there and yells out loud  
french fries  
french fries  
french fries for sale  
and all those smiling faces line up in a row  
and out they walks into the cold  
and in goes that old lady  
and picks up all them magic wands  
and uses them down at the train station  
to turn princes into frogs  
and then she has a feast of feasts  
near the beginning of the frosts  
over to the left and all in rows  
of frogs legs in the thousands  
dripping grease and keeping time

at school they told her she  
was shooting herself in the foot  
had a good aim that old lady specially as a girl  
that was just before the telephones  
the tree poles  
heavy and dark against a clear blue sky  
she's up there near the top of one of them poles

and running on the wires  
uses one of them magic wands from the school to keep her straight  
in time  
that was after she writes her lines  
I will not shoot myself in the foot  
seven thousand hundred times  
runs so fast along them wires she converts  
to light  
they hear to think she's lightening  
water's what some of them say  
rapid water  
firey cold and voicing  
like writing on the page

that's right about the same time she started to keep her writing  
that same summer she puts that spoon in that crows nest  
and all them crows fight over that spoon for years  
until that raven comes over from the landfill sight  
eyes the size of jackfish  
is what the auntys say  
eleven days in court and even them crows can't cut a deal  
that blackrobed judge with lemon in his eyes  
silver spoon potbellied right into his thighs  
big-mouthed and drooling  
talking history whitening out lies  
the old lady gets it all down  
word for word she knows that short hand in her head  
word for word and this is what that blackrobed judge says  
to them crows  
make sure you ask for what it says here in the book  
and there's only one answer and you can't peek and hey  
good luck  
time's up  
next that's when them crows turn into hazelnuts  
right there on the hardwood floor  
and raven grabs that silver spoon  
blackrobed judge and all  
good thing the old lady gets it all down  
before she heads out in her car

and drives right up and over that landfill sight  
 eyes the size of jackfish  
 I am many things says the old lady  
 but I am no carpenter  
 I can yacht with the best of them

they say them folks in whitetown made a tv-type-movie script  
 just after the old lady dies in her sleep  
 at the tv-type-movie funeral there's a teacher from her school  
 who speaks from over to the left and all in rows and says  
 her favourite food was french fries and there's something about  
 her writing  
 lazy and arrogant  
 makes it like a rich french dessert  
 undeniably excellent  
 but affordable and familiar to few  
 the auntys laugh and laugh and eat popcorn with extra butter  
 clinging to their salt  
 them folks can't read worth beans  
 is what the auntys say  
 they got it right there on the kitchen table  
 all framed with the old lady smiling tight  
 her false teeth right there beside her in a cup  
 she makes that cup at the senior high  
 paints words on it too  
 uses the extra paint left over from her car  
 big red hen red  
 words are jewels is what she writes on that cup  
 words are jewels  
 grains of rice to kneel on depending on the view  
 and there she is with her hair just long enough to fit a sprig of  
 a tail  
 and hair pins all around  
 haphazard  
 gardening over by that landfill sight  
 and the sun  
 pats her on the back warms words out from her sprig of a tail  
 something about them kind of words like jawbreakers  
 too hard to bite and chew  
 just slow just suck so at the layers feel each one  
 circle after circle says the sun that hot round day  
 way back before the tv was even a pimple on a newborns butt

they say that old lady used to spend lots of time  
 out from time and trailing waiting praying for a miracle  
 and out pops this big red hen  
 body the size of a car  
 one of them volkswagens  
 except with chicken scratches on the road  
 and in hops the old lady right there in the middle of the road  
 ties a scarf around her hair and gets behind the wheel  
 the whole time up front in the trunk of that car them eggs  
 whisper she is magic she is ready to return remember  
 she is magic she is ready to return  
 good shocks on that car burden of the past  
 then right there on the side of the road  
 mother superior blackrobed and frostbite on her nose  
 selling hail the size of golf balls  
 that big hen never could resist a good deal warm red wise  
 besides them hailstones got a piece of paper froze inside  
 tells the future tells no lies  
 that big red hen pecks the biggest ball the biggest slip of paper  
 takes them four days just to suck that water off  
 four more days to let that paper dry  
 and on that paper  
 something rare and precious so much loneliness born out of love  
 it is said that abuse by a mother is of the worst kind  
 and especially it is said that abuse of a mother toward her  
 daughter is the most damaging  
 and the old lady stops that car says oh  
 we need our past we need to remember  
 just look back feel smell breathe see them all  
 thank them for their medicines  
 thank them for their miracles  
 how to enjoy with the understanding of pain  
 the outpour of intimacy of love safe and warm and free to breathe  
 and underneath the seat of that car little people dulled and shy  
 belittled and afraid  
 alone  
 gone to church gone home  
 gone away  
 bye bye

every spring them crows show up right downtown in whitetown  
 each year there's more on account of the kids and grandkids

them folks in whitetown can't tell them crows apart  
 can't understand crow talk either  
 they don't know them crows take care of their own  
 this is years after all them crows turn into hazelnuts  
 right there on the hardwood floor  
 and raven grabs that silver spoon  
 that's the year they call on the old lady to help them out  
 the year the giant butterfly shows up with them crows  
 it's just about late afternoon and picking up the sun  
 one of them dark brown butterflies with the yellow-winged tips  
 bright like the sun  
 and them crows all singing hollow doo doo I'm a butt  
 hollow doo doo butt again  
 hollow doo doo give us a bingo  
 to revive us again  
 that's just before them crows all up and die  
 right there in downtown whitetown on the bar-strip drive  
 block off rush hour traffic for four hours  
 folks everywhere with cameras and camquarters and loonys  
 selling plastic crows on a stick each with a genuine hen feather  
 so in drives that old lady  
 and yells out  
 french fries  
 french fries  
 french fries for sale  
 and all those smiling faces line up in a row hup-two-three-four  
 hup-two-three-four and feeling like part of the group  
 and in drives that old lady and picks up all them crows  
 and drives them down to the bingo hall like they ask  
 I am many things says the old lady  
 but I am no driftwood  
 I can hobdaub with the best of them

at school they told her she was simple  
 well thinks that old lady I certainly haven't been keeping time  
 reflection in words and so much going on  
 fear of their fear  
 this is the same afternoon they think she dances for the class  
 gets so hot all them gophers running about outside  
 thinking it's full spring  
 kids all in the windows yelling hey look at all them gophers  
 that old lady must be dancing up there in eleventh grade

understanding the dreams would help  
 and so she dances  
 dances right there on top of the teachers desk  
 on account of she needs the extra space  
 kids all in the windows see them crows  
 cold-dulled and scrawny  
 over on the telephone lines up for air or rapid water  
 firey cold and tossing a silver spoon  
 singing hold me hold me love me hush hold me hold me love me hush  
 sweet harmony and residues of something unnameable  
 waiting for that moment for the my the me of love  
 thought memories in print and bouncing off them wires  
 all crowy wavy lines outrageous  
 right through them windows and in to that old lady  
 by this time everyone even all them teachers line up in the halls  
 even the principal that girl's in a league all her own  
 and so she dances hurt angry threatened on guard left out  
 a receptacle for poison verbal poison voice is sacred spewing in  
 the air invisible erased  
 case history case closed

at school they told her she was a no-good slut  
 said she'd have a baby like all the rest of them squaw-girls  
 a system made to measure for the gang  
 prettify the language faking calm for flat bare hate  
 content to cruel and back again  
 that's the year it snowed right through the spring and into june  
 that's when she was twelve years old  
 ashamed of her fear  
 hides away shaking fetal lost in the view  
 breaking through the pain  
 starting at the back the way she looks at magazines  
 reads between the stories sees the lies  
 that's when she fills out one of them ads for manure delivery  
 bills it to the school  
 they say they flew in that manure all the way from texas  
 dumped it right there in front of the school  
 principal couldn't do a darn thing on account of the snow  
 blocked the view from the windows poop and snow poop and snow  
 sure smelled around that school and all the way over at them  
 badlands and deep deep in the pines  
 that's when all the ravens drop in for a while

poop all over the windows of that school  
 poop all over that poop too  
 make so much noise caw cawing fart farting laugh laughing  
 sing singing dance dancing caw cawing  
 they bring in the SWAT team  
 slipping on that poop  
 look like mud wrestlers kids placing bets and selling cool-aid  
 from the road  
 then those cops they get that poop all in their pistols  
 clogs up their barrels kids cheering from the side of the road  
 then out of the blue in crawls all the babys in whitetown  
 brown themselves up pretty good  
 take those guns right out from under that SWAT teams noses  
 and throw them up up up and to the ravens all in rhythm all in  
 rhyme sing singing caw cawing out from time  
 out from time and trailing waiting praying for a miracle  
 and out pops that big red hen  
 body the size of a car  
 one of them Volkswagens  
 buys some cool-aid from them kids poop scratches on the road  
 and in hops all the babys in whitetown  
 tie scarfs around their heads and fill up that that big red hen  
 open the sun roof open all the windows  
 on account of the smell  
 and then that big red hen creamy smooth soft kind  
 stops for that old lady  
 tears the size of jackfish  
 that's the part they get on the tv-type-movie script  
 the part where she that old lady those babys look down  
 and turn around profound it's not your life it's ours anyway  
 how would you like our life for your birthday or something

## Squaw Guide

You Audience  
 Me Squaw  
 need to practice those lines  
 it's not the same as tarzan jane address  
 in the old movies  
 he yelled as he swung out holding his vine  
 dropped down to deliver commands  
 to Simba after bossing Cheetah all day

it's not exactly the same either  
 being called squaw  
 after going to a high school football game  
 coming home on a bus  
 this drunk white hosehead  
 yells out from the back of the bus  
*there's a squaw sitting up front*  
 no not me - didn't look around - not me  
 because I grew semi-invisible  
 nobody noticed I was  
 the only invisible Indian  
 going to high school in the city  
 back in the fifties  
 unless there were lots even I didn't see

I needed the low self-esteem concept  
 to explain why nobody was on my side  
 why nobody told him I belonged  
 they were being good Canadians  
 nice he was racist & nice I was the squaw  
 it didn't make me act up like Jay Silverheels  
 as if I would speak up to joke  
 WHAT DO YOU MEAN  
 WE WHITEBOY

I wasn't Tonto or tough enough  
 to defer say *kemosabe*  
 you had to be tough  
 a popular INDIAN Jack Jacobs  
 football champion  
*aw fuck 'em if they can't take a joke*  
 would a stand up comic  
 do a Dice Clay routine  
 in the north end or west end?  
 yeah it's possible to get laid

if Winnipeg born

why not if Tarzan  
makes Simba lie down when told  
& Cheetah screams pointing to his butt

ok ok now no more drudge grudge  
I'm taking women studies  
& that's tough  
because I don't have a closet  
that's empty enough for me to get inside  
think about it  
I got too many skeletons  
the closet is full  
haven't counted yet

them bones dem bones  
dem shy bones  
like the typical squaw in the old days  
I was the shy kind  
my best friend used to laugh  
holding fingers fanned out  
hiding her whole self  
the big mouth  
because it was hard to be a big squaw  
big public squaw  
I was too invisible to laugh out loud

at the university I go every day  
in my classes I transform  
from text book squaw  
who doesn't speak up  
I usually do this  
scary business when not supposed  
to say anything contentious  
silence is rewarded or reworded  
everyone looks my way  
to check if I am being quiet each day  
I might abuse my feminisms  
switch bitch from academic squaw  
to academic sasquatch

as I speak squaws are past tense  
used to be but nobody says that word much

hey but wait a minute

did you gaze at me funny  
intend just a bit  
to call me a squaw?

being a squaw is very demanding  
in the movies or on a native production set  
it is when a woman gets told  
*make me some tea*  
*braid my hair*

by a warrior no less  
on the res the women say *my chief what my chief says*  
his speech never mentions *my squaws my papooses*  
now why is that

it's hard to be a political correct squaw  
my secret: don't ever open mouth  
or let yawn indicate how boring  
better not say anymore about that one

but say the drunken squaw is most awesome blend  
saw some young women doing some reverse  
squaw baiting  
they were sitting in a bus shelter  
whenever a guy would go by  
one of them would say  
HEY HUN-NAY  
then they would laugh

I should try that stunt  
TANSI HUN-NAY  
get my voice all husky  
BOO JOO HUN-NAY  
at the next pow wow in South Dakota  
I would say in breathy tone  
WASHTE HUN-NAY

maybe feminism makes me too shy  
to joke around much  
the women now talk about outing  
wonder out where?  
out in the bush?  
probably out of my mind  
like I said  
my closet is all junk  
I'm serious  
know all that stuff  
inside the me

## Memories Two

Your voice is deep as you share  
your pain, my eyes fill with  
tears as you pour your thoughts  
on the table and you sense I'm there  
your pain of being a child in an  
alcoholic's home; –hurt at having  
parents with no ears to hear your joy  
or hold you in your sorrow  
your deepest thoughts are shared  
quietly you speak I hold my breath  
afraid I'll hear the truth  
I listen, I hear, I wait  
when all is quiet you sip your drink  
your eyes start to dance and your mind  
begins its playful journey  
we jump to your defense when you start  
your quiet reverie not knowing what is  
about to come from your polished actors  
voice and suddenly we hear your words  
“Yep, I been ugly all my life.  
First I was fat and had a big nose.  
Then puberty hit I started to thin out  
but I got pimples. Then the pimples started to go  
but now I've got wrinkles and I'm starting to go bald.  
When that stops I'll be dead  
but I'll make a great looking corpse.”  
your sister with her golden smile  
looks on in wonderment giggles erupt  
I watch with pride at my bear cubs  
as they tumble and roll in words  
through laughter and tears and love  
we share our short time together  
topics change and serious conversation  
erupts in giggles as time marches on  
Well you can imagine everyone in the restaurant staring—  
guess they never heard laughter before or they'd never heard it so loud and so  
free. Of course I asked if I could use his lines, being a writer  
and all, and he of course said no. I wrote them down anyway.  
“We could probably share” I said.  
He smiled real hard and reached over and held my hand.

Song

## Students of Scat

Pellets bumpy  
like mulberries,  
peanut-shaped  
porcupine droppings,  
black winding  
braids of mink.

SCAT!

Some droppings  
say exactly that.  
Territorial animals  
marking their range.

Leavings  
on fallen logs  
atop rocks, at tree base.  
Following the pathways  
looking for sign  
seeking stories in scat.  
Abundant brown marbles  
number the waboose.  
Bunches of bullets  
say deer use this meadow.

Scat like good gossip  
whispers your whereabouts.  
Straining to hear,  
breaking apart,  
dissecting like sentences  
these symbols of your presence.  
Fat berried sausages  
write coyote's menu-du-jour,  
Bee's wings, fur.  
Tiny bones of mice  
label skunk's dark passing.

Tracing each passage,  
 learning your patterns.  
 Finding where badger burrows,  
 or raccoon fishes.  
 Who climbs the apple tree  
 and who's eating who.  
 Nature's census takers:  
 she with her nose  
 I with my eyes  
 my dog and I  
 devoted students of scat.

***Are you sure Hank done it this way?***

(for Craig Womack and all the C & W Ind'ns out there)

Plucking old country songs  
 on a borrowed guitar  
 with a broken e-string.  
 Rusty thirtysomething voices  
 whining wailing  
 toward midnight—  
*You'll cry and cry  
 the whole night through.*  
 Riding glottal stops  
 and grace notes,  
 Flying your musical time machine,  
 Remembering  
 everything  
 but the lyrics.  
 Sounding  
 Singing ourselves  
 out of that room  
 on word chants  
 words like ancient rituals  
 we longed for  
 just out of our reach  
 like youth—  
*Why don't you love me like you used to do?  
 How come you treat me like a worn out shoe?*  
 Making music like some things matter  
 still  
 Bending those strings those notes  
 into shapes  
 we almost recognize.  
 Sparking chords  
 that glow like animal eyes,  
 Voices burning fast patterns  
 like sparklers  
 sounds exploding fireworks  
 into the smoky darkness  
 of long gone bayou memories—  
*Please release me  
 Let me go  
 For I don't love you*

*Anymore.*

Linked like quarter notes  
hands on one another's shoulders

Swaying  
paper dolls strung out  
on laughter.

Holding tunes like reins  
steering ourselves  
clear

through 500 years of history—

*Poor old Kawliga*

*He don't know what he missed.*

Conjuring off-key harmony  
feet tapping

fingers snapping  
beating time like owl's wings  
on moist night air,  
who-whooping our own call.

Last lonely laments  
criss-crossing voices  
camping out on the edge of everything known.  
Nowaday quests.

Songs.

surfacing around us like faces  
ancient enemies swooping like hawks  
crayon colored fantasy friends of childhood  
old wrinkled grandmas  
and bolo-clad granduncles,

Gathering together  
drawing us into their spinning visions  
centering us finally  
in vibrating sound  
an arrow

off taut bowstring  
shot straight at the heart—

*Eight days on the road*

*and I'm gonna make it home tonight.*

## Dark Humor

## Pass it On

The future of this planet is dear to my native heart  
And in my nature's simple way I want to do my part.  
So, when I leave this body to roam the firmament  
I'd like to know you did as though this was my testament:

Recycle all you can:  
The burned can have my skin;  
The ill can have the organs  
That are contained within;  
The student doctors can take what  
They need to learn their trade;  
The rest, just bury in a box  
That will bio-degrade.  
Thank you.

## Poem of 29 Lines Series 1

we must simply remember a few blue rocks like to stop rain  
even if it kills us  
all bastards cry in their empty dime-store meals at one time  
or another lest we forget  
raps bullying one another on the left side of a detailed  
picture of Castro reclining looks like he dropped in to view  
the loaded machine gun rather I would like to see more richer  
red right here see are you sure you know what you're doing I still  
wonder what she meant by that only it doesn't bother me as much as  
placing that final bet  
prancing horses slugging a split second behind  
blue sapphire rock glistens pausing to take a picture with  
a brand new 35 mm gosh it's fun out here in the flat plain  
too bad it doesn't last Malone hey baby get off my back  
what pains I take it doesn't matter at this place  
Moses tried his one-line speech again women let us rise  
for old time's sake way down south where spotted eagle  
flies wings grazing my truck as it sits thinking  
one thin sucking dime would sure make a difference sometimes  
I think pausing to take a shot is everything like an ass  
that continues to graze while the flash sears him to the spot  
forever caught in his own time  
fettered by these meticulously drawn out lines I pause  
myself unable to quite escape  
fire burning across my back at an uncertain speed governed  
by laws unknown  
get a grip for Christ's sake it isn't every day we have the time  
for riddles paradoxes and stupid guilt trips is it  
speak for yourself whispers my truck

# Identity

## **Only Approved Indians can Play Made in USA**

The All-Indian Basketball Tournament was in its second-day. Excitement was pretty high, because a lot of the teams were very good, or at least eager and hungry to win. Quite a few people had come out to watch, mostly Indians. Many were relatives or friends of the players. A lot of people were betting money and tension was pretty great.

A team from the Tucson Inter-Tribal House was set to play against a group from the Great Lakes region. The Tucson players were mostly very dark young men, with long black hair. A few had little goatee beards or mustaches, though, and one of the Great Lakes fans had started a rumour that they were really Chicanos. This was a big issue since the Indian Sports League had a rule that all players had to be of one-quarter or more Indian blood and that they had to have their BIA roll numbers available if challenged.

And so a big argument started. One of the biggest, darkest Indians on the Tucson team had been singled out as a Chicano, and the crowd wanted him thrown out. The Great Lakes players, most of whom were pretty light, refused to start. They all had their BIA identification cards, encased in plastic. This proved that they were all real Indians, even a blonde-haired guy. He was really only about one-sixteenth but the BIA rolls had been changed for his tribe, so legally he was one-fourth. There was no question about the Great Lakes team. They were all land-based, federally-recognized Indians (although living in a big midwestern city) and they had their cards to prove it.

Anyway, the big, dark Tucson Indian turned out to be a Papago. He didn't have a BIA card but he could talk Papago so they let him alone for the time being. Then they turned towards a lean, very Indian-looking guy, who had a pretty big goatee. He seemed to have a Spanish accent, so they demanded to see his card.

Well, he didn't have one either. He said he was a full-blood Tarahumara Indian and he could also speak his language. None of the Great Lakes Indians could talk their languages so they said that was no proof of anything, that you had to have a BIA roll number.

The Tarahumara man was getting pretty angry by then. He said his father and uncle had been killed by the whites in Mexico and that he did not expect to be treated with prejudice by other Indians.

But all that did no good. Someone demanded to know if he had a reservation and if his tribe was recognized. He replied that his people lived high up in the mountains and that they were still resisting the Mexicanos, that the government was trying to steal their land.

"What state do your people live in?" they wanted to know. When he said that his people lived free, outside of the control of any state, they only shook their fists at him. "You're not an official Indian. All official Indians are under the whiteman's rule now. We all have a number given to us, to show that we are recognized."

Well, it all came to an end when someone shouted that "Tarahumaras don't exist. They're not listed in the BIA dictionary." Another fan yelled "He's a Mexican. He can't play. This tournament is only for Indians."

The officials of the tournament had been huddling together. One blew a whistle, and an announcement was made: "The Tucson team is disqualified. One of its members is a Yaqui. One is a Tarahumara. The rest are Papagos. None of them have BIA enrollment cards. They are not Indians within the meaning of the laws of the government of the United States. The Great Lakes team is declared the winner by default."

A tremendous roar of applause swept through the stands. A white BIA official wiped the tears from his eyes and said to a companion: "God Bless America. I think we've won."

## Swing Your Ta Ta 'Round and 'Round

when I was a little girl  
I stood at my grandpa's knee  
watched him play his solitaire  
touch his cards you didn't dare

*put the red six on the black seven!*

at one elbow he had his Scotch  
had it early and on the rocks  
sat the other elbow-his tally sheet  
his running score was always neat

*my gramps was a CPA for the IRS  
and just wait till you hear the rest!*

keeping score of who was ahead  
trying to beat the dealer in his head  
he said something right out of the blue  
now I'm gonna tell it to you

*had a casino right there in his head!*

before I do, one thing to know  
my grandpa was a Pueblo man  
first one in his big ole family  
to leave the reservation for white man's land

*no-he wasn't no white man  
first one to leave!*

so on this day he said to me  
Dolorita look-here-see  
got a question little friend  
are you part Indian?

well I knew just what to do  
tell him 'grandpa-I'm with you!'  
so I gave him one of these [*nodding*]  
slow and steady as you please

then my gramps did something strange  
and since that day I'm not the same  
set down his game said honeydew...  
lets you and me think this through

set down his cards and left his game  
and up to me my grandpa came  
said if it's true my little friend  
that you are part Indian  
tell me now and tell me true  
tell me which part is you

then he took up my skinny arm  
and in his eyes see there was no harm  
he made his hand just like a saw  
and on my shoulder worked grandpa

he asked me again and again  
to tell him which part was Indian  
while he slowly sawed at arms and neck

*pretty soon I said what the heck!*

yes on that day with old grandpa  
we chopped me up with his fake saw  
and I stood there still as a big-eyed doe  
stood there with skin white as snow

well he went back to his card game  
and since that day I'm not the same  
sat down and said sweet honeydew  
remember this day 'cause they'll say to you  
you ain't Indian and you ain't part

because the white men have no heart  
so don't give them that, stay close to me  
forever in our history

*you can play that red jack now  
put up that ace like that OK  
what is underneath that three?  
oh look there – just what we need!*

## Quail Trail

Tum dip Drag Dip Tum-ta-tum-tum  
They come like no-see-ums  
Twenty bucks at the gate for the guided  
Tour on the tourist trap lines,

A spiral wall of high front rises  
Erasing the ancient roads and ways.  
First the mock case in telegraph station:  
They closed the Wet Dream Catcher Drive-In  
Adult videos and Artifacts Store for  
Too much demonstration. But,  
You can still place your bets at the

Moccasin, where Top-Less Woman will take

Your order for the Three Sisters Bar & Grill.

Tum Dip Drag Flap Flap Tum-tum  
Get your hair done and face painted at the  
Four Grandmothers Beauty Salon.  
Next Door at Vision Quest Opticians  
the glass cases come in four colours,  
with a feather matching...  
Red Turtle Tanning, Skins & Hides,  
Got a process makes rayon like buckskin,  
cotton like doehide, white skin deep copper red

(for a while), GO NATIVE! GO NEW AGE NATIVE!

Tum tum drag dip flap flap dip

Get your ticket at the Pan-Indian Headgear and Hardware Store  
Then Trickster Taxi, yessir, will drive you 'round to the  
Four Winds Sailing Club, above or below the dam's up to you.  
Whatever you rode in here will be waiting for you at the  
Take-out chicken place, near the Broken Wing Cafe where you can  
Buy feathers to tie on your car so the boys on the path at the  
Exit gate will know you're just passing through and they'll let you  
Go, on your far away.

Tum Tum Tum Tum hey hey hey

## That Sounded Like This?

This old wrinkley faced native guy  
wearing a old style polyester track suit  
said something to me  
as me and her were  
walking by him  
the other day  
that sounded like this;  
"ASUHM"

"huh" i thought outloud "what is this guy saying"  
he was pointing at me while nudging his head side ways "ASUHM"  
he had a huge toothless grin "ASUHM"  
my face started turning redder,  
I asked her (my friend Kendell) what this indian guy was trying to  
tell me.  
"ah, ASTUM, that means come here in Cree, I thought you were Cree,  
don't you know nothing?"  
"ah, shut it told you i'm struggling to find my identity where I fit  
in this world as a half breed"  
"you and your identity fixation, just talk to the guy"

so i approached this pointing toothless laughing native man  
and he said"  
"AWESOME OUTFIT SISTER!"

\*pronunciation - ass (as in ass) - um (sounds like yum)

\*pronunciation - ass (as in ass) tum (as in tums - you know the cheap  
way to get your calcium)

## Looking for the injuns

This time  
I stayed in a fancy hotel  
charged it to the company account.  
Not one of those itchy places.

Wake up call.  
Breakfast by the pool.  
Check out time.

An old frenchman with a ten gallon hat  
walked in, both of us waiting  
at the front desk.

He was lost  
looking for the museum.  
I decided it's time  
to overcome my thing  
against these people.  
I will help this lost man.

I gave him directions  
pointed to a bridge leading to the old fort.  
He smiles and says  
"Is that where all those  
injuns are lined up?"

Silence.  
I turned my back  
abruptly dropped off the key  
then marched out of the lobby.

Backing out of the parking lot  
I see him in my rear view mirror  
hands flying in the air telling his story.  
Then it hit me, he meant  
the old steam engines lined up along the road.

## Untitled

I'm gonna throw a party. Yessiree. For i have \$.85 burning a hole in my pocket and last night i had a vision. A vision, i tell you. Of closets.

See, i just learned a beautiful song by a...er, 'liberal'?...no, 'lebanese'?...no, no, 'los lobos fan'?... a folk singer anyways, named Catie Curtis. It's called 'radical' and it addresses the struggle of anyone who just wants to love somebody, but finds themselves embroiled, at every turn, in societal expectations that one either keeps it in the closet, or every act becomes a political statement.

As a heterosexual, i felt a little odd about loving this song at first. Was it appropriate, or was it appropriation, i asked myself, for a straight gal to sing this? I went to bed last night with this question. In the dark air swirling above my bed, i saw the first door, the first closet, and then there were more.

Now this first wave of the vision is nothing others haven't seen before, i'm sure. It was just that i saw how our world is full of closets. So, in the wake of this vision, i sprawled in my bed, unconsciously adopting the posture of my teddy bear.

I have to pause in the transmission of this vision in order to admit to his presence, since this is about closets, and things we hide in shame, and i am a grown woman and i've travelled in far lands, survived earthquakes, faced down muggers and psychos, and i have a teddy bear. There. I feel liberated. So anyway, there we sprawled, Flower and me, and i counted closets. Well, there's the classic gay closet. Then there's my friend who cross-dresses. If he secretly wears jeans and t-shirts, would that be a 'clothes closet?'

Then there's witches, who have largely survived, since the Spanish Inquisition, in the 'broom closet.' Only now are they coming out, as responsible Europeans seeking to revive their Earth-based spiritual traditions.

And how about all those Metis who grew up in the white (usually 'french') closet? Given my hair and skin colour, i've always got that option, to open that door and put the 'indian in the cupboard.' Actually, i guess that might be called a 'bannock closet.'

Then there's those of us who pass for full-blood and are encouraged to closet our white heritage, in order to be taken seriously in certain born-again indian circles. The 'columbus closet?'

At this point, the second wave of vision hit. (I hasten to add that I had been ingesting only macaroni and coffee. Remind me that there is serious inquiry to be made, at some point, into poor diet, mild allergy and susceptibility to spiritual insight.) Anyhow, this is what i saw.

Things got weirder. I saw Jehovah's Witnesses, getting a retro-active abortion on their born-again status, and taking their new earth-based spirituality into a closet marked 'jehovah's witness protection plan.' I saw neo-fascist Native Traditionalists in closets, eating chinese food and listening to old Abba songs.

I saw hard-core alcoholics, fast-food addicts and junkies furtively slinking into fresh-smelling closets marked 'balance.' I saw millionaires in the 'rummage sale' closet. 'That's not funny,' i said-as if the other scenes had been strictly hoohaw, but they were scooping all the best out-of-style polyester.

Things got serious.

I saw the 'development closet.' In it were the lively minds and deep spirits of 'lower class' people of every nation, who are expected 'pass for dumb,' or at least inarticulate. And i saw the 'love closet.' In it were heaps of hearts: a pile for the cool who scoff at emotion; a pile for soldiers, which were squashed beneath the pile for generals; a pile, squelching a lonely squelch to themselves, for bureaucrats and politicians; a shattered pile which once belonged to the monstrous. All of these piles had room for more.

I was getting scared. Everywhere i looked, there were doors. Closets. Everything sacred had a closet waiting for it.

As did the profane. Polyester pants hid closets full of real, affordable clothing for all. Boxes of name-brand macaroni and 'cheese' hovered sheepishly in front of a scrubbed-cotton farmhouse curtain covering a pantry/closet full of wholesome, affordable food. Televisions, steered by ghostly 'studio audiences,' scuttled furtively toward closets out of which came the joyful sounds of live stories, songs and dances in which everyone present participated in

celebrating the absurd mystery of our lives.

And i saw Poverty, Disenfranchisement ('Frank,' they called him) and Powerlessness, shuffling about in secondhand bodies, and loitering in front of a closet whose sign they didn't even try to read. Judgement might have come and started something with them, but she was too busy sealing up the edges of the closet marked 'All My Relations.'

It went on for a while more, this vision, but you get the gist of it, right? And you see why i'm moved to throw a party? The way i see it, reflecting on the meaning of this vision, all those closets must be bigger than they look. And i'm willing to bet they've got back doors; or more likely, given the zany nature of the world, secret passages and revolving walls. Anyhow, let's all pick a closet, dive in and meet on the otherside. Who knows who we'll be when we meet? Wear what you like, come as you aren't, i'll be the one holding the bingo dauber and whistling a (gasp) country song. Oh yeah, it's BYO(t)B – bring yer own teddybear.

## Discovering the Inner Indian

It's been hundreds of years now since we started importing Europeans here to Turtle Island. Despite various programs aimed at maintaining genetic purity, crossbreeding has been inevitable from the start. The odd thing is, somehow, some people have grown up ignorant of their Turtle Islander bloodlines and inheritance. You wouldn't think it was possible, but it is. Today, many seemingly 'white' people wander in a wilderness of confusion, unaware of the identity of that strange thing inside, that part of them that rears up from time to time in the course of their lives, causing inexplicable behaviours and reactions – as if they are host to some colonizing agent. If this dilemma sounds familiar, this little questionnaire is for you. Gentle reader, be you the scion of wealthy New England Republicans, be you the uneasy heir to generations of Victorian Royalists, be you an Aryan poster-child marked only by a strange propensity to tan easily, whomever you are, if you can answer yes to these simple questions, you may be the lucky owner of an Inner Indian.

1. When square dancing, do you compulsively round off the corners?
2. In a deli full of fancy prepared meats, does the bologna speak to you? By name?
3. Do you tend to start formal speeches, addresses and presentations with "So anyhow...?"
4. Have you compulsively shouted 'Bingo!' in any of the following situations: at a football game when the quarterback is calling a play, during Hamlet, when the actor asks '2B or not 2B'; during the countdown to launch a space mission?\*
5. Do you talk to trees? Do trees talk to you?
6. Do you possess an uncanny ability to tell time by the sun, and get irritated by the great mass of associates who always want to start a half-hour early?
7. Are you incredibly good-looking?
8. Do you see right through all that car-manufacturers' propaganda about 'seats five comfortably?'
9. When asked how many people are in your family, do you answer 'it depends.'
10. Are you seized by the urge to blockade, even in unlikely situations – at McDonald's, in public washrooms, etc.?
11. Do you instinctively hate the song "White Christmas"?\*\*

12. Do you take natural phenomena – passing birds, thunderstorms, road-killed chipmunks, and so on – personally?
13. Do you have super-strong lips and/or chin, and the ability to give directions with your hands full? \* This actually happened to one of the founders of our Institute, who was a highly-paid NASA official until his Inner Indian spoke up and freed him from that commitment, giving him both the inspiration and the time to help us begin our work. \*\* This symptom alone might also point to an Inner African, Inner Asian, etc. So anyhow, gentle reader, if you have answered yes to a significant number (say four, for example) of these questions, do not hesitate to contact us here at the Institute for Newly Discovering the Inner Aboriginal Now (INDIAN). Operators are standing by with details of our affordable Inner Indian Seminar packages. It costs so little to join the tribe, and if you act now, we'll reduce the price of our exclusive workshop meal plan, featuring your choice from our delectable menu: bannock and lard, macaroni, or fried bologna sandwiches. To discover your Inner Indian, just pick up your phone and dial 1-900-WANNABE. Make your reservation today.

By Doctor A.M. Sees Well (With Glasses Anyhow) and Dr. Little Pointy New-Age Rock Clark (Crystal Lee "Looks Like Ice" Clark and Anna "Banana" Marie Sewell)

## Of The Sphere of Politics

politics yes  
indians at play  
sung true

*true indians? or true politics? take your pick.*

Home

## ROAD SIGNS POEM

INDIAN BLOCKAGE AHEAD -- SLOW DOWN OR ELSE

IGNORE WHITE MAN ROAD SIGN  
YOU ARE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

STAR TRUCK  
THE NEXT GENERATION

APPROACHING  
BINGO PALACE AND CASINO  
SPEED DOWN

WHITE WOMEN AHEAD  
KEEP BEHIND

CAUTION  
CIA/CSIS SURVEILLANCE ZONE

FLYING DUST RESERVE

COME TO A COMPLETE STOP  
THROW OUT ANCHOR

COYOTE CROSSING

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE ROAD

POT HOLE NEXT

POT HOLE AGAIN

KEEP RIGHT JESUIT ROAST  
MOHAWK SPECIAL  
INDIAN SUMMER POTLUCK

FIRST NATIONS MEN AT WORK  
FOREST FIRE AGAIN

INDIAN RESERATTI MECHANIC  
FIRST DRIVE BY

PASSING LANE  
AS IF

WARNING DON'T PICK UP STRANGERS  
YOU MIGHT BE RELATED

ROAD TO NOWHERE  
JUST FOLLOW IT  
YOU'LL SEE  
YOU ARE NOW LEAVING REZ  
MAYBE THE REZ BE WITH YOU

**A Ball Story**  
**Related to Some of Us by an Elder Okanagan**  
**Cowboy Story Teller**  
**In the Traditional Way**

Do you know  
when the first Indians started  
to play ball? They wanted  
to make themselves a baseball team,  
but they didn't have the equipment,  
and they didn't know the rules,  
so they went and asked the Indian Agent  
about it. The Indian Agent said,  
"You boys need bases,  
bats, gloves, uniforms, and balls."  
The Indians replied, "Yeah,  
we do need all that stuff."  
So the Indian Agent made them  
a purchase order  
they could take to town  
and get all the stuff they wanted.  
The Indians were happy,  
and the Indian Agent smiled.  
They now had something to do;  
they wouldn't be causing him trouble.  
A little competition would be good for them.  
The next day the Agent heard  
the Indians were matched against the town team.  
He decided he'd better go check them  
out. When he got to the ball park,  
the Indians were out in the field.  
They looked good in their new uniforms.  
The coyote caricature on their chests, however  
looked like a reservation dog to some.  
The Indian's coach was standing in their dugout.  
The Indian Agent asked him, "How  
are the boys doing?"  
The coach grinned proudly and said,  
"We're doing damned good."  
"Oh! What's the score?" the Indian Agent  
asked. "27 Nothing. . .  
but wait'll we get up to bat."

## Twelve Steps to Ward Off Homesickness

I.

Eat oatmeal and bacon for breakfast. Fry eggs in bacon grease and eat over cold oatmeal for lunch. Make macaroni and canned tomatoes for supper. Repeat for 5 days.

II.

Scatter machine parts around your lawn. Volunteer to let a friend park his old beater up on blocks in your yard.

III.

Check four dogs out of the pound for the weekend. Let them all run loose. Then try to jog to take long walks.

IV.

Look in the mirror and say "Damn Indian" until you get it right. Stop only when you remember the voice of every law officer that ever chanted those words.

V.

Light cigarettes and place them in ashtrays throughout your house. Inhale.

VI.

Enter your car through the passenger door. Drive it without using reverse. Continue for one week or until you remember a rez car is not a picturesque metaphor.

VII.

Read the police report in your hometown paper. Read the letters to the editor in your tribal paper. Read the minutes from the last RBC meeting. Read the propaganda from each candidate in the tribal election. List every area of disagreement and try to decide who is telling the truth.

VIII.

In summer, turn off the AC and open the windows to let in the flies and mosquitos.

IX.

Take your morning vitamin with warm, flat beer-3.2 if you can get it. Follow with yesterday's coffee heated over. Repeat daily until the urge to drive across three states disappears.

X.

Call home to find out how all the relatives are getting along.

XI.

Recite the names of all the suicided Indians.

XII.

If all else fails, move back.

## BINGO!

There was this lady from Yellowknife. She always played bingo and cards. She was never at home. Right after bingo, she would go to the card games. One Sunday morning, she decided to go to church. She hadn't slept all weekend. She thought, "I should go to church and pray to God that I would win bingo one day." She was in church and she fell asleep. When the priest spoke loudly, the lady jumped up and shouted out, "BINGO"! Then all the people started laughing at her and she walked out. Since then, she has never gambled again.

## The Hunting Party

"The two of us, cousins digging seneca root late in the season, decided that the search for the medicinal plant will have to cease. It was simpler in the beginning because there had been plenty of fruits, berries and all the roots we could turn over from the earth." Jay was reminiscing with his cousin Norman on the open porch of his cabin. They were watching the construction crew build a road. "I thought I was goin' to lose my foot that time."

"It was a miracle we found you when we did." Norman was laughing to himself and he grinned over at Jay as they laughed.

'Norman had lost his land and served time in jail for his audacity at trying to stop the razing of his home,' thought Jay as he looked at his cousin with fond eyes, 'But still, he's willing to joke and laugh.' "We came so near death that for a long time we could not talk about events that day." They were going to tell the story to his and Norman's grandchildren. Some of them were in Jay's small kitchen with his wife, Helen, getting some lemonade and cookies.

As they entered, the young people sat down and encouraged the old men to talk about their hunting party.

Jay took a sip of his lemonade, puckered his lips, peered at the yellow water, set it back on the tray and launched into his story.

We were out in the wilderness. It was a hot summer. The earth grew hard from the sun and lack of rain. The short stubby trees afforded little protection. The berries dried on their branches.

Jay, the younger of the two, decides to take a break and go hunting because he wants meat in his diet.

"Hunting is getting really tough around here," mourns a hungry Jay. He's in his early twenties, powerful in stature. His hands are the size of beaver tails and they are almost as dark. As he yanks the head off the chicken, his ebony sun-tanned face twists sharply in one direction; as he peels the skin and feathers, in another. He eviscerates the bird, then dips the carcass in lake water. "Did you see how long it took to get this bird?"

Norman, his cousin, watching him prepare the bird, says to him, "Game must have moved on when we got her. I can't locate anymore of that root either and we're down to the last bit of our coffee. There's tea left. We'll drink that tonight and save the coffee for tomorrow morning."

"Sounds good to me," Jay nods in agreement. "All our supplies are running low."

"It's settled then," says Norman. He leans back against the stump to close his eyes and rubs his knotted forehead, "It's hard work getting up at the stroke of dawn, walking for miles, and digging with a pickaxe everyday. Especially when we can only get about fifty pounds of this uncured stuff. How much do we get, \$5.50 or \$6.00 cured and dried. The green stuff they give us what? \$1.00 a pound. I don't like that; why can't they dry it themselves? After supper we'll start packing our gear so that we can leave early in the morning."

"I wish we could get \$6.00 a pound, I'm afraid it's much less. Don't ask me, our travellers passing through the other day mentioned the money.

It's too bad we couldn't get a moose or even a deer for all the time we've spent here. How far is it from home anyway?

We've moved camp so many times that I can't remember how far we have actually gone." Jay shakes his head at the thought of the miles they paddled and trudged over various levels of terrain in the dusty wilderness.

"Most of our seneca root is dry. That's one good thing about being out here, so in a few days all our stuff can go to the store. I'm afraid things are not over yet, I figure we should use the better part of two days to get home. That's two days of steady paddling. It's not going to be fun." Norman was thinking ahead, picking out the camping spots during the two days they would be working their way home. He contemplates how the river was around a bend and could not be seen from camp. They have to paddle through two lakes and one tough portage to reach the settlement. Crossing the lake to the settlement was three hours of concentrated work.

Everything is still; the evening is coming in fast as day birds make a last run over the lake.

Norman sees a ripple that a water bug makes near the shoreline and watches until another insect's movements cancel them. The land and air missiles begin to stir. He yells over to Jay, "Hey, when is that food going to be ready? The mosquito brigade has arrived. I think this is the advance party."

Jay returns, "Kill them all, that way they can't tell the others where there's good eating. You'll have them and all their relatives. Once that happens there is no stopping them." Turning his attention to his cooking, because, the grouse, carrots, potatoes, and dry onions are almost done, he adds flour and pronounces the mass ready for consumption.

Norman tries his cousin's stew. "I've tasted better, but it seems like such a long time ago. We ran out of salt a couple of days ago; it's pretty hard to

make a decent stew without salt." The rest of the meal is eaten in silence except for slapping exposed skin to beat off the flesh and blood eaters.

"I suppose there is no point in crying the blues about any of the things that could have gone right and the things that didn't. It's just our luck that we couldn't find a big stash of the root but I think there should be enough to pay for our time and buy a few things when we get back."

Norman, ever the optimist, leans back after swallowing the last of the bland stew.

"We should do some packing before it gets totally dark." Jay squints into the growing darkness and now that he is thinking of leaving, the countryside seems downright unfriendly. Seeing yellow eyes glare at him from the darkened tree trunks sends him into shivers.

"Most of the food containers can be packed. All we need is the coffee pot and maybe the frying pan. Our tools and things can be tied up in bundles and ready to load in the morning. You can bundle your bedding if you want."

"I think I'll keep my bedding out, if you don't bald-headed mind." retorts Jay.

"Just a suggestion," laughs Norman.

Between sips of dark tea that have the smell of woodsmoke, Jay's large hands pack his equipment. He savours his drink, "The only drawback about tea drinking is that the stuff leaves an unpleasant coating on my teeth. Maybe I shouldn't boil the damn tea... Nah, it probably wouldn't make a difference."

He throws the bundles of tools beside the tent as he jumps into the tent and closes the flap. He can hear the bugs as they hit the canvas wall. Jay cuffs the side of the tent which sends the biting insects into paroxysms of fury each time he punches them off the wall.

Norman says, "I wouldn't tease those things; they bide their time and they will get you. Maybe not those ones but their relatives down the road. Mosquitoes know. They are of one mind and one soul. What one knows all the others know."

Jay, "I don't think so, besides we are out of here tomorrow. These are just little itty bitty things. They may take some blood, but I don't think they can do any real damage."

'Spoken like a true nitwit.' Aloud, "Don't say I didn't warn you. My advice is to be careful. My dad told me, his dad told him and I believe it. If you don't, please don't say so in my presence." Norman shakes his bedding free of a couple of huge spiders.

Jay steps on the spiders and gives Norman a nasty grin as he readies his bedding. He is not as thorough as his 'cuzzay,' but he is not climbing into bed uninvited.

Norman, turning, sees a snake slither from Jay's blanket, lifts it's head and with flicking tongue, disappears underneath the tent. Ignoring it, he turns around and goes to sleep.

Jay is cold as ice and can feel himself sink lower into the quicksand. It tugs at his heels. Try as he might, the quicksand does not release him. The roar of a bear knocking down trees to get to him, makes him want to scream, but no sound comes from his dehydrated, constricted throat. He feels hot breath on his cheek and something shaking his shoulder. He strikes out.

Norman sees Jay thrashing about in his nightmare as he makes coffee. Norman decides, after watching the flailing of the arms, the sweat and the weak whimpers that he's had enough. As he rouses Jay, a jabbing fist punches him in the eye. Falling over with a red haze blanketing his right eye, Norman lashes out, catching Jay on the shoulder.

Jay jerks upright to feel Norman's follow-through strike his nose, which instantaneously swells to twice its normal size. Clutching his bleeding nose, shrieking, "I can't see." Jay pulls himself to his knees with his head down on his blanket. Bleating, he keels over.

Dazed, Norman is in a corner of the tent with one hand over his swollen eye. The resulting slit leaves only enough room for the eyelashes to poke through the lids. The eyelashes grind against his eyelid. He can feel the optic nerve go into denial, then shock. He moans, opens his other eye which is now in sympathy for his injured orb and will no longer focus.

Both men start to swear. Norman is swearing under his breath while Jay curses out loud.

Then Norman says, "I think we better get out of here." Holding his face he says, "I have coffee ready, get your clothes on and lets go, before I kill you."

"It's not my fault. You shouldn't come up and shake me when I'm having a nightmare."

"Nightmare, bull! You should have gotten up when I made a fire and coffee. Come on, let's leave."

The men drink the scalding coffee in painful contemplation until finally Norman says, "Bundle everything left in the tent, then bring it to shore. I'll pack the canoe, then I'll come and help with the tent."

"No need, I'll finish up here and bring things to the canoe," says Jay as

he steps out into the fresh grey dawn, feeling refreshed in spite of his big bloody nose. "Blood will wash off." Jay packs everything into neat bundles. "My nose will unswell, no I mean... deflate, hell, it's not blown up." He can't seem to think straight so he lets it pass to wait for the swelling to recede and hopes his nose returns to normal.

The tent is the last to come down. He unties all his pegs, pulls everything off the frame, lays the tent flat on the ground and begins folding. When that's done, he pulls the pegs out of the ground and ties them onto the tent bundle. "Don't want to have to make pegs every time we want to put up the tent."

Jay looks around and sees he's done a good job, decides that he needs to lay down for a moment. Leaning against the bundled tent, he hears Norman approach the now disassembled camp. He feels a kick at his foot and listens to his cousin as if he is far away.

"Come on Jay, get up, we have a long way to travel."

Jay leaps to his feet before he's completely awake, staggers slightly. His cousin warily catches him by the arm.

"Are you okay?" Norman protects his injured eye like a boxer.

Jay rights himself and replies, "I'm fine. Let's get going," One hand covering his nose.

Norman picks up a bag, then heads to the lake.

Jay watches two cousins bounce to the shore until the two merge. He tries to avoid focusing on his nose, but it seems to grow in proportion to not thinking about it. His eyes tire, he closes them, opens them, shrugs and picks a couple of bundles and trudges after his relative. 'My nose is so sore. That was some dream. I wonder how Norman is able to see with only one eye. I'm having a hard time seeing around this nose.'

Norman is having trouble because his undamaged eye is not adjusting as quickly as he would like.

Soon everything is in the canoe.

Jay picks up one of the bundles and says, "Hah! Emergency canoe, I'm glad we didn't need it on this trip. I'll put this baby some place where we can get it. Leave a small space in the middle for it."

Norman complies. "I hope we don't need it. Is everything cleaned up at the camp site?"

Jay nods.

Norman says, "Well, let's get on our way."

Before leaving, the men say a silent prayer. Norman lights cedar and sweetgrass, then turns to the four directions. He drops the ashes into the lake.

The laden canoe is pushed away from the shore. The silence of the forest lake is broken by the sound of a loon upset at their trespassing. "When did that sucker get here?" asks Jay, "No wonder the ducks left in such a hurry."

Norman replies, "He wasn't around all week, must have been out fishing in another lake. Who knows? The only thing I know is that they don't like ducks and they kill them."

"I know and these bloody loons taste like sardines or something equally vile."

The men paddle and tell each other jokes and after they reach the first lake they get into more open water. This is a bigger lake and one they must cross to reach the river to their home lake. After a few miles portage past a small rapids, followed by a short passage across a large water body, they would be home.

The travellers reach the opposite shore as evening begins to show its long shadow over the day.

Norman cuts and assembles the saplings for the frame.

Jay drops pegs where he thinks they'll be required.

Norman shakes the tent out.

Jay pulls out the small gas stove to make tea and cook supper. "There isn't much to eat. There's been nothing to shoot and the only fish we could catch were a couple of these bony perch. Cleaned and fried, they will make for an adventurous night meal."

After supper, they pull the tent over the frame and crawl into their bedding.

Jay hears the mosquitoes buzzing around the tent. He slaps the canvas and laughs. He goes to sleep and dreams of home and a nice soft bed.

The next morning, rising with the sun, they know that they have to cross the portage with just enough time to paddle across their lake before nightfall.

Norman does not want to be paddling in the dark since he is having trouble enough steering during the day. He shakes his head as he thinks of what Jay said about seeing double. He thanks the Creator for looking after a couple of fools.

The camp knocked down and packed up enables them to paddle down river ahead of schedule. They reach the rapids where they should unload the canoe. The portage is not a long one but the bank is steep.

Norman turns to his cousin and says, "I know we can paddle these

rapids. I don't want to lug everything across on my back. Let's just go."

Jay peers at Norman, "Are you nuts? How good can you see out of that eye of yours?"

"I know we can do this. My eye is fine." Norman lies.

"You know what, I don't like this idea of yours. But, it's not like they're big rapids. I've been down them before, so what the heck." They push off from shore and soon are in the grip of the river's powerful downward plunge. Two very sharp curves planted with boulders soon threatens their fragile craft.

Jay tells himself, "This should be a fifteen minute ride."

Norman yells, "You steer, I'll keep us off the rocks. Make sure we don't go sideways. No matter what, keep us pointed down river."

The roar of the rapids drowns out everything. The white water foams around their canoe, covering them in spray as the waves throw them back and forth in rhythm.

Norman keeps his paddle always in readiness, switching from side to side, not worrying about his cousin who is as expert as anybody. The work is fast and furious and the canoe is not responding readily because of the weight.

Jay is sweating, as well as being drenched from the spray. His arms soon feel like they aren't attached anymore but still keep switching from left to right almost rising upright to steer. The roar suddenly ceases and the river no longer jumps and bumps but instead becomes an exceedingly fast flowing mass of water heading for its final destination.

The cousins, exhilarated and exhausted by their experience, wave their paddles in the air. Their arms are no longer tired and their hearts start to beat regularly as they slow down to breathe normally. The steep rocky cliffs that had shot by during the rapid ride give way to a rocky shore and further along are bays which have pebbles and beaches. The sand glows in the early afternoon sun. They are now approximately two and a half hours from home.

"We've paddled long enough. We should soon see the bay and the pines." Jay is feeling good as they finally arrive at the land mark and angle out into the lake. After about an hour, the men see what they think is a floating log. The log maintains the distance between them.

All of a sudden Norman realizes they are not chasing deadwood.

"Moose!" he yells to Jay. "He's swimming across the lake." He paddles for the moose.

Jay steers the canoe toward the moose and adds his powerful strokes to his cousin's and they skim toward the swimming animal. The anxious bull

peers at them.

Jay reaches for his shotgun.

Norman says, "Shh... sit, and be quiet." He reaches for rope attached to the canoe and makes a noose, motioning to pull closer to the swimming animal and drops the makeshift lariat over one side of the rack, Norman draws the rope tight, motioning to his cousin to drop back but keep paddling. As the canoe slows, he picks up his paddle, judges the animal's speed and keeps time with his cousin.

Norman tries to steer the moose closer to the shore. If he doesn't, they may end up miles from where they want to be, especially if they get caught in the current he is trying to avoid. Once he is sure the animal is heading where he wants, he allows it to travel freely.

As land quickly approaches, Norman goes into action. Placing his oar in the canoe, he yanks on the rope, succeeding in slowing the moose but does not advance the canoe. He needs to be beside the moose in order to drown it. "The moose knows the water is shallow!" he yells to Jay, who is now paddling twice as hard.

The agitated moose senses solid ground beneath him.

Norman yells, "Get closer! I need to get closer!"

They are within fifty feet of the beach.

Hooves scrape bottom and the animal surges forward jerking the canoe.

Jay's oar is almost ripped from his grasp as their vessel shoots forward.

The canoe leaves a weak rooster tail, it's being towed so fast.

The moose gets better footing and soon the shoulders of the huge beast break the water.

The canoe is skimming the surface at a now break neck speed.

Norman loses his oar in the water, "Get the gun and shoot!"

The rocks jutting out of the lake near shore are coming at them.

Norman screams, "Forget the gun! Steer! Don't let us hit!"

Jay lets the gun fall back into the scabbard to concentrate on steering the canoe.

They miss the rocks.

"Gun! Get the gun!" Norman is screaming. He is a demented figure, with one massive purple eye, hollering, "Shoot the moose!"

Jay grabs the gun but Norman is sitting in front as the moose hits shore at a gallop.

The fifteen hundred pound creature pulls the canoe up the squat lake bank with no difficulty. It sways as it bounces along the rocks.

The canoe flies ten feet overland, lands with a thud and Norman is deflated and unable to draw in breath immediately. Wheezing, he finally manages to draw in oxygen.

Jay is attempting to aim the gun. All he can see is the moose's behind as it leaps over fallen debris.

The deadfall holds as the canoe smashes into it and Norman is thrown clear. He lands on the palms of his hands and hears a sickening crunch as both wrists fracture.

Jay is still standing as the gun in his hands explodes. The emergency inflatable raft released by a surge of energy inflates quickly, and just as fast dies a gasping whoopee cushion death from thousands of pellet holes.

The canoe structure, not meant to withstand this type of abuse, splits in three as Jay is thrown and is solidly wedged under the seat.

The moose is crashing through the bush.

Jay, still stuck, sees his cousin climbing onto his feet.

With a lopsided grin on his face he peers at Jay and says, "Well, Cos, wasn't that a hell of a ride?" He holds his hands by his side and adds, "I think I broke both wrists."

Jay tries to get out of his predicament to find that he has no leverage to extricate himself. "Come here and help me get out of this."

Norman replies, "I can't do anything, my wrists are swelling. I think I broke them. They hurt so much." He's whimpering.

Jay replies, "I need leverage to get out of here. My behind is stuck. Come and stand where I can get a hold of you."

Norman stands beside his cousin as Jay grabs his leg to get the leverage he needs.

He bandages his cousin's wrists and surveys the damage. "That does it for the canoe. Where do you think the moose has gone with the prow? Must be halfway to the Arctic Circle."

"That moose sure can move. We completely misjudged it."

"What do we do now? How far do you think we are from home? Two miles? Three? Five? No matter. After I get you bandaged up, I'll start walking. If I don't make it back, by nightfall, you can expect me tomorrow."

Norman is nodding as he agrees, "I need you to gather some brush for kindling and maybe get my blanket spread out. At least I'll be able to keep warm if you don't get back. I think you should stay, you know why? Someone is always travelling. If we wait, we'll get a ride home."

"That could be a long wait. I'll follow the shore, shouldn't be a problem." Jay is not as confident as he claims to be; in fact he is full of doubts,

"I haven't been this far from home along the shore. You have. Is there anything I should know about?" asks Jay.

"No... o" the 'no' trails off as Norman ponders the route home. "It was a long time ago." He recalls a creek, "You will have to walk beside this creek for a mile inland to cross at a safer distance. I was told not to try to cross earlier if I was on foot."

"Were you told why?" queries Jay.

"Nope," replies Norman.

"I'll see you in a while," says Norman as Jay turns to the shore and clatters away.

The stones underneath Jay's feet change continuously in shape and size. He reaches the creek before long and looks it over. It is a slow wide creek. The scummy water smells stale and is about six inches deep, covering a muddy bottom. Looking out over the lake, he sees that the silt is widespread around the mouth of the creek. "The far shore looks to be about a quarter of a mile away. Too far to swim," mutters Jay. "I'd like to keep my gun with me if I could, so I'll walk across a little ways down." Jay starts down the creek bank. The ground rises and falls. At a low bank, he figures, "I'll try crossing here."

Raising a storm of flies, he makes his way to the smelly water and slimy mud which immediately rises to his ankles. It squelches as he picks his feet carefully through the muck. Gingerly stepping into the creek, takes another step and begins to sink. Angling into the water, he escapes by pulling his feet out of his boots. Turning around and scrambling out of the creek forces him to leave his boots in the mud. On shore amidst all the flies, he watches his boots sink. Looking at his muddy socks, and the way he came down, he decides to go on.

The path meanders in and out of the forest. Even with no shoes, the walk is pleasant.

A tree has fallen across the path and Jay can't see a way across except to climb over. Tossing the gun over and finding a handhold, he climbs the huge tree blocking his route. The hunter makes it over the top before a wayward branch cuts into his eye. He feels a needle enter his eye. He clasps it as he screams and loses his balance, ending by falling head first off the trunk. Branches tear at his face and his clothing shreds as he rips through the branches.

Stupefied, regaining his footing and gingerly touching his face which feels like a mass of raw hamburger, he steps forward. He can hear flies

buzzing around him. Blinded, he stumbles away from the fallen tree and falls into the creek. He is surprised to find a clear brook filled with cold water. He washes his battered visage and tenderly feels his damaged eye. He can't see his gun anywhere, but doesn't want to spend too much time looking for it.

Crossing the creek, he finds the route is full of sharp stones and treacherous roots. His feet are soon cut to ribbons. The bugs are eating him alive. He swats them and comes away with a mass of dead carnivores in his hand.

As he stumbles into a clearing and leaves the creek route, he begins a dangerous hike into the forest. Staggering away, thinking he can hear the sound of water nearby, loses himself in thicker woods.

As Jay wanders into a clearing, he hears a snort behind him. Turning to dodge any danger, he discovers a moose rising onto its haunches, with a rope around his antlers. Jay stands frozen as the moose backs up. It stands there snorting and finally lies down. Jay, through his irritated eyes, can see the moose is bound to some saplings and is unable to move.

The moose, sides heaving, scowls at Jay.

Jay looks into the mad eyes and is moved to compassion. He inches forward.

The moose keeps his eyes on him, decides that he is harmless and waits.

Jay reaches out murmuring kind, soothing words as he tugs at the rope. Managing to get the moose to turn its head to create slack in the noose, allows him to free the moose of the tether. Jay trips and falls while backpeddling, hitting his head on a stump. He loses consciousness.

Disoriented, Jay wakes up to dim lighting and grasps his aching head. He wanders around the woods bouncing from tree to tree until it is too dark to see anything. Discovering a hollow in the ground, he finds he has to turn around numerous times to find a comfortable niche to rest. The mosquitoes he's been slapping now fly to him in droves. Their incessant high pitched whine is driving him crazy as he pulls his tattered jacket around him and burrows his face into the ground.

Jay wakes to find heavy slobbering lips on his face. He opens his good eye as he feels hot fetid breath on his face and sees a red thing being dragged across his face behind some very huge teeth. The bear licking his face stops, looks at him, and swats him on the shoulder, then steps over the prone Jay to meander away.

Jay, trembling in fright, listens until he can't hear the bear any longer. He gets up. The bear has dislodged his shoulder. Reeling, he finds his body has been anaesthetized under so many mosquito bites. He is a mass of welts

on every available piece of skin.

He bites his hand to keep from screaming lest he bring the bear back.

Jay stumbles away from his den to the first obstacle, another fallen tree, smooth from years of use by animals. Warily climbing atop the once majestic pine, he slides heavily down the other side. As he lands he feels a piercing injury to his foot. Jay looks down to see a gory branch sticking out of his foot. Screaming, he does not care if the bear and his damned uncle hears him. The anguished scream becomes a lamenting shout from deep in his soul because death is near if he doesn't get help.

Jay's wail is broken by the sound of his name along with uttered curses.

"For Christ's sake, Jay, where are You? Yell to us!"

Jay is not yelling. He is bellowing, "Here!... Here I am!"

"At that point," Jay says to the rapt audience around him, "I would have kissed the moose's behind if he would have helped me."

"That's the strangest thing," says Norman, "The rescuers had come by shortly after Jay left and had gone after him. It got dark soon and they called off the search. The strange thing is that the moose led us to Jay the next day. It came to the lake and after chasing it, we found him."

Jay interrupted to tell the grandkids, "If I had stayed with Norman, I wouldn't have had to endure all those bites and this foot, which bothered me all of my life."

Norman adds, "The moose would not have had to save you but we made it out by the skin of our teeth. Oh yes, we had teeth in them days." He grins at the children and clicks his false teeth.

Jay said, "Norman found out who his friends were that time. Both his arms were in a sling, and he couldn't do anything for himself. It's a good thing he was married already. His mom already had him in diapers and once was enough!"

Everybody peals with laughter as lights from the construction generators start flicking on and turn night into day.

## **The Metis Dance of Doom! Eagle Soar, Eagle Soar!**

This is an actual account of working the coat check of an un-named Metis dance. People's names have been changed to protect my butt.

Let me take you back to a time when the World Wrestling Federation was real, girls were a mystery, and my fight with acne had just begun in earnest. That's right, the mid-eighties. This is my story of the night I learned about love.

I was working the coat check at yet another local Metis dance. That was one of the many jobs that I did. I would stand at the door behind a small desk and hopefully get a few tips from drunks as I doled out their coats at closing time. Sober people never tip.

I was working with my friend who was a great artist and he donated some drawings of eagles for the door prizes. In actuality my mom bought them off him and donated them. Naz and I, Naz is the name of my friend, sat at the door and watched the mostly drunk people dance and flirt with one another.

Since we were very sober we took particular notice of 'drunk dance.' You know; beer in one hand and stagger, stagger left, stagger, stagger right and spill. Then repeat until you fall down or the music stops.

The night was half through and I had one of my ESP moments. I knew that this night was going to hold some strangeness. It was time to give away the door prizes. Naz was thanked by the attending Metis council and the prize was awarded to this real drunk biker type Metis. He wore a Harley Davidson shirt, the kind with white sleeves that went all the way to the elbow and brand new boot cut, black levis. He also had this huge moustache that covered most of his face. He staggered to me and Naz holding the pictures of the eagles in his hands.

I feel I have to give you some back story on the pictures in question. I found a picture of an eagle on an american courier envelope and Naz had one National Geographic with a picture of an eagle in it. Those were Naz's post haste inspirations for these two naturalistic drawings.

The drunk moustache face looks us over and starts telling us about how true these pictures were.

"Hey man, yer a great drawer man, cause I rode with eagles man! Yah, I rode with them everywhere cause I'm a biker, man!"

Naz and I stood there waiting for him to finish. He introduced himself as Ace and Naz thanked him for the slurred compliment. But suddenly Ace got real serious.

"I gotta know man... How long did it take to draw these?" Ace asked.

"About a day." Naz answered.

"But how did you get the eagles to stay still for so long to draw them though?" Ace asked still unmoving.

We both thought he was joking but we realized he was being dead serious. "Patience, dude." Naz finally said and Ace accepted it as the truth. He stuck out his hand in the old brother type handshake.

"Eagle soar, man. Eagle soar." He shook out hands without another word and staggered back to the dance floor.

I looked at Naz and said, "'Patience, dude?' What the hell?"

He looked back at me and held out his hand. "Eagle soar, man. Eagle soar." We shook hands and started to laugh.

That was when the door opened and I saw Mandy. She was a girl that I had worked with over the summer on the same grant through the Metis federation. I had the greatest crush on her.

She was quite a sight to behold standing in the doorway. She was tall, brown and athletic. She had on sheer black stretch pants that never covered her ankles, a cool black bolero cropped jacket and little white Reeboks. She was a Eighties fashion plate.

"Hey Trev!" She yelled and gave me a big hug. Hello beer breath my old friend, I thought as I held her for that moment. She let go and looked past Naz and to the dance. "There's a lot of people here."

I know she probably said more but my hormones kicked in and my ears throbbed. All I could do was look at that goddess disappear into the dance.

Naz snapped me back into reality by saying, "Hey, isn't she supposed to show you a ticket or something?"

He was right so I ran off into the direction that I last saw her going. I ended up at the bar. I asked the bartender, my brother Sam, if he saw this woman, but as soon as I opened my mouth, I saw her. She was in the side room where they kept the alcohol. She was in the process of stuffing the sixth long neck beer into her stretch pants. That moment I wanted to be a beer bottle. There they were, trapped between the most beautiful flesh and the sheerest pants. The beer perfectly contoured in black cotton spandex. I could even make out the twist off caps.

Before I could say a word, Sam came in to get some beer. Automatically

I tried to defend my princess but the evidence was overwhelming and she was summarily kicked out of the hall.

That's when she turned into my love object from hell. First she began trying to kick in the door for her 'beer.' I tried to talk to her through the door but she was none too happy with me.

Finding that she couldn't bust the door with those beautiful Reeboks she sashayed drunkenly to the parking lot. She finally found something that her Reeboks could damage. Mandy broke about ten car windows before Sam found out and called the cops. I plead with him not to go out there but he wouldn't listen. You see, my thinking was that just in case I ever took her home to meet the family I didn't want them to remember her for breaking our car window and keying the new paint job.

I waited outside at the hall door as my bro went into the parking lot. I could hear them arguing about the beer, the cops, and the fact that she was smashing everyone's car windows. That's when she rushed him. Sam caught her by the throat with both hands and held her as far away from him as possible. The problem with his plan was the fact that he was about six inches shorter than Mandy and her reach was a lot longer

Man, could that girl throw a punch! There was my brother walking her out to the road and she's doing numerous combinations to his face. His head was snapping back like one of those speed bags boxers use but he just kept walking.

Left! Right! I couldn't tell which hand was weaker. Every shot impacted solidly in his face. Sam just kept walking toward the road.

I'll never forget the wise words of my brother as he escorted her out of the parking lot. "YOU (BANG!) CRAZY (BANG!) BITCH! (BANG!) STOP (BANG!) PUNCHING (BANG!) ME (BANG!) IN (BANG!) THE (BANG!) FACE! (BANG!)."

That was the story that night. The cops did come and take her away. Sam woke up with two black eyes and I, well I never had the guts to ask her out.

I learned three things that summer night: One, being the doorman and coat check person can be interesting. Two, my brother is a good bartender and can take a lot of punches to the face. And finally, three, Eagle Soar! Eagle Soar!

## Okanagan Recipe

Original Appeared in *Okanagan Cook Book "Life's too short to stuff a mushroom."* 1997

I thought about what I could contribute to this prestigious collection. \* Since I so seldom prepare creative cuisine, being limited in my creative skills to cooking up new plots for my points of view, my difficulty was in sending in an original (let alone an aboriginal) recipe. I wondered if perhaps stewing for awhile over old leftover prose pieces could somehow be counted and worked into a flavourful combination to warm the soul. Or perhaps, I mused, I could do something with each trifling little detail which I laboured over for hours and ended up cutting in the final edit. It could produce such a savory concoction if glorified by stirring in one ounce of the sublime. Speaking of which, ounces I mean, I thought of the full measure of flowing phrases which plop ripe and juicy with sweet innuendo into your early morning half-sleep and how they might be squeezed of every ounce of meaning and mixed into an elixir of heavenly home brew fit for royalty to imbibe (which only they do) and we could drink, perchance to dream. Back to everyday reality, I thought of the thick haunches which I would like to roast and burn to a crisp and carve with relish, having attended and blackened a few roasts in my friendly neighbourhood. Alas and alack I seem to have hit a dry spell and out of desperation am prone at such times to suggesting anything. Cliche and old adage overruneth my cup. Sauce up everything. Dressing plain old salt of the earth fare can miraculously produce silk purses out of sow ears (edible but hard to stomach). Sugar and spice sure is nice. See what I mean. Oh to have the wisdom of the sage. I could simmer forever without having to ever serve up anything original. At such trying times (like this one to contribute) it is with chagrin I offer humble pie and suggest tried and true fare. I always eat crow when all else fails. Try some with a pinch of tongue in cheek for a fresh new taste.

## Colonization

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**Poem of 29 Lines**  
**Series 2**

shades dancing seemingly unknown to all and sunder freedom they  
yell feeling down and out at the time no longer aware that time  
has made yet another mark on a cave wall someone once told me a  
dream woke me with fledgling facts alluding to some sort of truth  
mingling with faint odour of sex not knowing what on this goddess  
forsaken dream we call life in our weaker moments what are we all  
so worked up about someone would like to know that if it isn't  
going to be important in the end madly flinging shadows neatly into  
dust particles in space for whoever wanders into the territory  
maybe a lone tourist as a matter of fact it is a woman calling  
herself the one and only pooba that's me only on one wants  
to admit it although a faint voice travelling along the edge of a  
fine line echoes a refrain from a postcard depicting a cave  
let us pray what we deeply desire only an obscure  
emotion maybe smatter cat got your tongue well don't worry child  
it all adds up to a correct number in the final analysis sex is  
probably a recourse malone should maybe write that somewhere  
rainy day evenings are useful although I've heard tell if you pull  
a cover up to your chin while making love it helps somewhat malone  
in a corner clutching his mexican blanket about his own chin head  
lowered in anticipation of a question ultimately on someone's mind  
who are you and what are you doing here actually for the record  
attachments may be difficult to maintain but for chrissakes hold  
your tongue if it takes forever after all when the stream finally  
settles on an issue already we forgot the original position we took  
in the first place lessons learned instructions fall by the wayside  
a finishing touch is added for good measure a last ditch effort  
made and abandoned lest the pooba should chance by scattering beads  
maps schemes compasses endless forms battlecries

## “Shifting Savage Moods”

I thought about Jerry Yellow Old Lady how he could play basketball and the time he scooped ice down my blouse at a bar I was so drunk he disapproved maybe disrespected and I didn't talk to him for two years then he was sitting on the bleachers at the Siksika POW-WOW sitting next to some girl with long hair and he gave me the eye and hugged me good-bye at the education building when I told him I was cruising to the Okanagan Nation I dreamt about him for two weeks then remembered the ice and how Buffalo muscles made strong thread for beadwork

“SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

The father of my warrior daughter didn't go dancing didn't drink was extremely spiritual one night while camping the firelight hit his face he wigged all over his lawn chair when this white woman talked to him he unbuttoned one of his shirt buttons and then he got up stuck his hands in his pockets and went to help this woman start her car and we never kissed again and I remember how women threw hot rocks into Buffalo's stomach to boil to drink

“SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

My Navajo lover told me that sex was overrated and I avoided him until after our wedding date I like kissing till I can't feel my lips no more and I remembered how we used Buffalo shit to fuel fire

“SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

I went with the guy from the reserve and his blank stares pulled rage out of my hands but we went to the mountains in Banff and saw two Eagles flying together so this meant we were to be together on the eve of our vows I saw an OWL and knew I would die inside if I signed the paper so I climbed out the window and remembered how Buffalo sinew made bows

“SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

I really liked this Cree guy he sucked my cheek and gave me a hickey on my high cheek bone and his mother chased him with a broom yelling, “What the hell are you doing sucking her face?” I tickled him and he didn't like it so he threw me against a wall and I knew it was bad medicine and I remembered how Buffalo hair was good for fancy dance belts

”SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

I dated this long braided man who wore suits at the Aboriginal Professional Association and he bought me a Italian suit cause I don't wear skirts and he came to my granny's house and didn't even shake her hand and refused to eat her Saskatoon berry soup and I told him he was lost and I didn't feel like finding him like a Indian woman messiah and I remembered how Buffalo ribs made strong sleds to slide down the Sandhills

“SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

I was riding on the greyhound cause my transmission went on my truck and this Indian cowboy sitting next to me made me laugh in the belly and didn't talk too much and we shared silence walked in fields of wheat and he kissed my lips till they went numb brushed his teeth and washed his face in my granny's blue basin and told me I would be afraid of chasing Buffaloes over cliffs and I remembered how the Buffalo tongue was sacred and a delicacy among Siksika

“SHIFTING SAVAGE MOODS”

## Elementary Choctology

The new governor of French Louisiana meets the Choctaws:

“It seems to me that they are true to their plighted faith. But we must be the same in our transactions with them. They are men who reflect, and who have more logic and precision in their reasoning than it is commonly thought.”  
Kerleric, 1753

One year later:

“I am sufficiently acquainted with the Choctaws to know that they are covetous, lying, and treacherous. So that I keep on my guard without showing it.” Kerleric, 1754

## Sunday Chicken And Soft-Spoken Tom

Tom was a soft-spoken Cree from Cutknife. He was my father. But as far as mothers went, a trail of women moved through our lives. In the end, I was the only one who stayed.

Perhaps it was his gentle doe eyes that gave him trouble. They showed his heart and it wasn't far to his pocket book neither. However, for me, his eyes told me I could trust him completely. With these expressive eyes, he'd look at me. “Hear how I found you? You were like a half-drowned kitten in front of the Biggar Hotel.”

“Then...? what next?” I would ask just because he liked to tell the story.

“Then the cook tried to get you into the hotel with a big hamburger. Stubborn bugger, you were. Wouldn't budge!” His narrow shoulders would straighten proudly. He'd tilt the worn tweed hat back, enjoying his role. “There you were, a little Injun girl sitting there like the world passed you by. So I gave you a quarter and said ‘Go buy yourself a Hires root beer.’ Tom always shook his head at this part. “You threw the quarter back and said, Go drink your beer yourself.”

His eyes would sadden, “You was put here for God's punishment, to straighten me out.” Woefully he'd say, “And no more beer.” He just did this for emphasis. I was just a kid, not no law enforcer RCMP. Anyway, the way I remember it, Tom went in for his beer. When he came out a large lady was draped on his arm. I noticed them coming down the sidewalk, her stocking-legs heavy and his feet tiny. He was strutting like a rooster, silver spurs on those size 6A cowboy boots.

His boots stopped beside me. “Still here, little critter?” Head cocked, he says to the woman, “Doreen, what say you and I get a bit of fresh air?”

But it was he that sat down beside me and asked me in Cree, “Where's your mother?” I pretended they weren't there, especially the nosy man.

“What's your name?” he asked again in Cree.

I heard him all right. I didn't answer.

“Darned women,” he said scratching his head.

“Geez, God made them funny. Talk when they want and when they don't, can't get them started!”

Sighing, he informed Doreen, “I'm going in to page the responsible party.”

He was gone for a long time. Doreen offered me a stick of Juicy Fruit. I took the gum, seeing there were no strings attached.

Finally, Tom came out. "Lookit, Doreen, no one knows who she belongs to. You're a woman, what do you say?"

"Take her down to the RCMP station, Tom. Let them take care of her!" At this the little man paled. "Throw her in the coop? Naw, I ain't no stoolie!"

Looking thoughtful, he threw a sideways glance at me.

Then he looks at Doreen, "I told you I got a spread. We'll leave word here for them to put up a notice at the post office. Anyway, word will spread through the moccasin telegraph."

"You'll get us thrown in the caboose," Doreen warned with a head shake.

This was where the conversation ended for me. My eyes had fought sleep for three days, now they closed. I awoke in a dim-lit cabin and there was an awful smell. Turning my head, I could see Doreen across the room. She was cracking eggs into a smoking frying pan. Between the egg cracking and grease splattering sounds, Doreen and Tom argued. "What'm I to do with a child?" she asked. "Anyway, who says I'm staying?"

The smell of burnt eggs filled the cabin.

"You tryin' to kill us?" questioned Tom as he swung open the cabin door.

Walking to the stove, he dismissed Doreen away with a wave. He tucked a bleached flour sack into his striped coveralls. Clouds of flour rose. Soon there was bannock on the table. Finally he made bacon and good smelling eggs.

"Okay kid, you can come out now!"

I pretended to sleep.

"Last call," he said, "you come and eat or I'll leave the cookin' to Doreen here next time."

I came and sat down.

As the days stretched into weeks, the arguments went on. Doreen would protest that Tom wasn't trying hard to find my family.

"The RCMP..." she'd say, then Tom would walk away.

"It's not the Indian way!" he'd say.

I was beginning to forget my mother's face, the edges of my child memory blurring. What I did remember was her eyes, which were not much different from Tom's.

"The old women are talkin'! I may not be from this reserve, but I can hear them. I can make it out. They think this one is mine!" she motioned her

mouth toward me. Clanking around the kitchen, she cleaned up.

"How many times I got to tell you, her name is Janet-Marie?" scolded Tom. He was changing the subject.

True, it was my name. I had held out telling for what seemed a long time. But when Tom told me his spotted pony wanted to know, I told. Weeks became months. Old Doreen and I, it looked like we was becoming family to Tom. No more was said about notices or telling the RCMP about me.

Then we came upon hard times. I guess I must have been about five. Anyway, it was before I started school.

It began by Tom bringing home very little game. We had already eaten most of the chickens without killing the best egg layers. Tom had already sold off a horse or two.

One night, they sent me to bed early. Lying there, my ears perked up.

"I guess I'd better leave the reserve for awhile. I heard there's work puttin' up fences south," Tom stated.

High-pitched, Doreen's voice accused, "You're not going to leave me here are you? Those women, they don't like me. I saw them countin' the months I been here, just in church, too!" Her fingers drummed the table nervously.

"Oh, all right," soothed Tom, "I'll figure somethin' out. The mare's foalin' Probably, I'll get a good price later. Maybe I could get a down payment from a guy down south I know."

Next day, Tom returned from hunting with a few squirrels.

"I'm not eatin' them gophers!" Doreen says when she sees them.

"What kind of Injun are you anyway?" Tom looked at her in surprise, "These ain't no gophers!"

Doreen sniffed haughtily and stomped away. And she stuck to her guns, too. Not one tooth touched that squirrel meat.

Not even Tom's concerned looks swayed her. He eyed her ample curves worriedly. "Say Doreen, you're not gettin' skinny are you?"

Now, hunger in the eyes of your loved ones makes you do contrary things. One night both Tom and Doreen were acting unusually accommodating.

"You can stay up late," Doreen says to me. "Then we're goin' for a nice truck ride. We'll see the stars and them nice northern lights!"

That night, Tom was picking out all the special stars.

"See that bunch there, Janet-Marie? That's the Big Dipper."

"Is it cloudy enough yet?" Doreen whispered.

"Shh," shushed Tom.

"There's old man Dumont's farm," Doreen said in her church voice.

"Right where you said it would be, Tom."

Tom didn't reply. Instead he asked me for the third time, "You sleepy yet Janet-Marie?"

I'm not stupid. I pretended to fall asleep, my head resting on Doreen's plump arm.

"That's it, she's asleep," whispered Doreen. Moving her arm gently away, she smiled at Tom.

Suddenly, Tom crouched closer to the steering wheel and the windshield. He looked up at the night sky. "Really good," he said, "it's getting cloudy."

He turned out the truck lights as we went down the hill. The silhouettes of old man Dumont's farmhouse and chicken coops came closer.

"Kill the motor!" Doreen commanded.

"Okay, Okimaw," answered Tom in a strange voice.

The truck coasted forward slowly until it stopped right by the chicken coops.

"Leave the doors open," Doreen whispered.

"Naw, the mosquitoes will get Janet-Marie. Jus' close it, light like."

As soon as they had climbed the fence, I sat up. An awful lot of squawkin' was coming from the chicken coops.

It quit suddenly.

That's when I could make out Tom's slight figure running frantically toward the truck. From his hands dangled two chickens, one still alive and protesting.

Behind him, Doreen got hung up on the barbed wire fence.

There was a long ripping sound, then she too was in the truck. They threw a limp-necked chicken on the floor.

"Let it rip!" she shouted forgetting herself. "Geez, I left part of my pants back there."

I pretended to sleep. I think they wanted it so.

A dog began barking. One of Tom's chickens began jumping and squawking. Doreen made a mad lunge at it.

"Let's get out of here," whispered Tom loudly.

As the truck roared down the road, old man Dumont's light went on.

The next day was Sunday. We went to church. The priest never mentioned the chickens.

Doreen saw someone she knew. "Isn't that old man Dumont there?"

Tom pretended not to notice. After church, we went straight home. Within minutes, Tom had changed out of his Sunday suit. Around the coveralls he tucked an old Red Rose bag.

"He was only a Sunday friend," he said to no one in particular.

Doreen brought up two chickens from the ice hole in the root cellar. They were cleaned. Tom had been up late.

Into the pot the chickens went. Tom added secret spices.

The most mouth-watering smell came forth. And as Doreen set the table, she eyed the stove longingly.

We were all waiting. Though what happened next was not what we were waiting for.

Around the corner, came old man Dumont's red truck. He didn't drive past.

He got out of the truck. Doreen mouthed the word RCMP and a look of apprehension passed between her and Tom.

But when Tom answered the door, he was a different man. "Why, come on in," Tom says to Dumont, like he was an honoured guest. "I haven't seen you in a coon's age!"

Old man Dumont sniffed the air. "About to have Sunday dinner?"

Doreen smiled a stiff smile.

After a few cups of tea, it became apparent old man Dumont was not about to leave.

"Sure smells good," he hinted.

Tom did what any self-respecting Indian would do.

"We'd be glad if you'd stay for dinner. It isn't much for a man who eats chicken all the time. Jus' a little soup."

Doreen set another place at the table.

I sat by the window wide-eyed at all the goings on.

"Come and eat, child," Doreen called sweetly.

It was a marvellous soup, the kind that keeps women like Doreen happy. With a dreamy look, she served herself more.

Old man Dumont had three bowls. He looked like he would never fill up.

It was when Tom was biting into a chicken thigh, Dumont says. "Damn those chickens! They sure are good. Best soup I ever tasted. Tell me, where did you get them?" He slammed the table with his big fist.

"Geez, I'd sure like to have me some of those."

I thought Tom would choke. He mumbled, "Biggar! got them in Biggar... ah... awhile back. These are the last of 'em."

“Well,” says Dumont, “I heard you was having hard times so I stopped by. Thought I’d offer you some of my chickens, but I see you’re doin’ jus’ fine. Damn good soup!”

That was a long time ago. Doreen liked old man Dumont’s chickens so much she took up with him. Me, I was stuck with Tom. I was family. Heck, when you have family you do what you have to do. This certainly was true for Tom, my father. Hunger made him contrary for that one time.

So this Father’s Day when we were toasting fathers and roasting chickens I thought of Tom for a bit. I know he’s up there in that big, open, chicken coop in the sky. I hope God has a sense of humour about Tom’s Sunday chickens.

## The Seven “C”s of Canadian Colonization

On June 24, all of Newfoundland celebrated the 500th anniversary of the landing of John Cabot’s ship, the *Matthew*, on the Island. Back in 1497, Cabot’s was the first European ship to visit Canada (not including the Viking’s short stay in Canada’s tenth province, back around 1000 A.D.). A fabulous party was held, including a cameo appearance from her Majesty, the Queen herself.

But not all were happy with the planned festivities. The Assembly of First Nations as well as other Native organizations and individuals didn’t really see this as something to celebrate. Some consider Cabot’s arrival as the beginning of a campaign of genocide and cultural destruction that has lasted 500 years. As an example, less than three centuries after Cabot’s landfall, the Beothuks, Newfoundland’s Indigenous people, were extinct. And while that blame can’t be specifically laid on Cabot’s shoulders, most Natives believe it started with him. At least in Canada.

But Cabot shouldn’t have to shoulder the whole blame by himself. He had a lot of company. Other venturers into the unknown have had effects on Canada and its Native people. And a surprising and interesting fact is, unusually, the name of many of these explorers start with the letter “C”. Perhaps this is a pre-requisite for conquering Canada. For instance:

Columbus – The man who made getting lost an art form. The prototype for men declining to believe they are lost and refusing to ask for directions. While not specifically or directly connected to Canada, his arrival in the Bahamas can be viewed as one simple earthquake starting several tidal waves. However, it is ironic that many white people every year still prefer to “discover” the Bahamas, and other spots in the Caribbean and Mexico that he came upon. Perhaps white people are migratory.

Cortez – Again, while not directly related to Canada, his actions have had wide reaching effects. He conquered an empire (the Aztecs) and was actually one of the few Conquistadors to die a rich man. At one point, he took a Native woman as a mistress and Christianized her to make her more acceptable. Known as being ambitious, a womanizer, and twice being arrested for breach of trust, it’s no wonder he was a politician, a former mayor in a town

in Cuba.

Cabot – Cabot's real name was Giovanni Caboto. Probably the first many men to change his name to get into Canada. Was amazed by the number of fish available off shore. It is rumoured that the crew attached ropes to baskets and lowered them into the water, then pulled them up, overflowing with fish. Ahh, the memories. Again, the first case of foreigners plundering the Grand Banks.

Cartier – Founder of Quebec City in 1534. Misunderstood what the local Natives were saying when he asked "what do you call this land?" as he indicated the countryside with his hand. Unfortunately the Native people looked where he was actually pointing, at their village, and replied "Kanata – a group of huts or a village." Kanata=Canada. The first misunderstanding between the French and the Native population. But not the last.

Champlain – The explorer of much of Central Canada. Though he spent decades in the New World, oddly enough Champlain never bothered to learn any of the aboriginal languages of the people he worked with and exploited. Even then, Quebec's Language Bill 101 was in effect.

Cook – Explored much of the coast of British Columbia after discovering Tahiti and the Hawaiian Islands while looking for the Northwest Passage. Though he first came to light for his meticulous charting of the St. Lawrence River in preparation for the British assault on the French at Quebec, and also his precise charting of the whole length of the rugged coast of Newfoundland. One of the first cases of Easterners moving to the West Coast.

Christ – Subject of the world's first and best selling "biography." Christ did more to change the lives of Canada's indigenous people than all the explorers put together. Unfortunately, sometimes for the worse, i.e. the Jesuits and more recently the Residential schools. But many embraced the teachings of this man and found happiness. The Church also brought more than just Christ's messages to the Native people, they also brought bingo.

Other honourable mentions of people "discovering and conquering" this continent whose name begin with the letter "C" include Clark (of Lewis and

Clark fame) who went to the Pacific Northwest looking for dinosaurs, and Custer, every aboriginal's favourite example of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But they lack that specific Canadian connection.

Most of these men were crawling through Canada's coast and interior looking for either gold, jewels, or spices, or more specifically, a new trade route to India or China. On June 24th, I thought it would be ironically fitting for there to be a whole line of Native protesters waiting on shore for the landing of the Matthew, all holding signs saying "India and China: That Way" and pointing north to the Northwest Passage. It would have done more to honour the spirit of these explorers than what the people in Newfoundland had planned.

Or better yet, they should have had some Chinese or South Asians waiting on shore. That would have thrown them for a loop.

## Last Ditch Religion

what about the Jesus picture in the house  
should say something  
spirituality becomes a guessing game  
have to call myself  
something believable  
when visiting a res

I am told about an elder  
what he said to a person  
not too sure of a church to join  
he asked what if after death  
his or her body would get thrown in the ditch  
even the born again traditional  
would be buried in a church cemetery  
when it's too late not much choice  
because right  
righteous kind  
relatives wan that way

so I found a faith  
when I won't spout out evangelical  
the spirits of the Mayans are back  
so if I testify to ancestors back in Mongolia  
how I know I'm related to Pocahontas  
I've been both Indian and Asian  
in former lives besides being a drunk  
Danish sea captain killed in a brawl

I neglect to talk hellish about the Catholics  
& sexual abuse & Pentacostal cover ups  
& how Christians murdered Jews  
don't want to convert anyone by accident  
if I could be a Mayan scribe  
more committed to writing down  
major events of the day  
I would write it all down in stone  
to rest assured  
a tribute to belief is in that Last Ditch Indian

what I wrote on paper will dissolve  
go back to the earth  
where more holy  
our days of decay

# Children

## The Team of Cheese Bob

My twin sister, Teresa, scrambled up the crab apple tree before I could stop her. I was too scared to go near the tree. The big, scratchy branches were stretching out to grab me. Already Teresa was deep inside with the leaves and twigs, almost at the top. I could barely see where she was anymore. I think that mean old tree ate Teresa up. Now I know why that tree was called a crab.

“This is your captain speaking!” Teresa screamed at me. I nearly jumped out of my skin. From deep inside the crab apple tree, her voice boomed out again. “The airplane will be leaving for Egypt in five minutes. Hurry up and buy your plane ticket if you want to visit the Queen of Sheba.”

I slowly walked to the tree. “I don’t want to play in the tree, Teresa. It’s too scary,” I whined. “We can play airplane on the ground.”

“Don’t be so silly!” Teresa yelled. “You have to be in the air to play airplane.” I didn’t budge. That stupid old tree wasn’t going to eat me, too.

“Climb aboard, passenger!” Teresa screamed impatiently. I held my head down and looked at the ground as I edged closer toward the tree. I wasn’t as scared if I didn’t look at the grabby-arm branches.

“That’s right, passenger,” Teresa bellowed. “For only five gazillion dollars you can fly to Egypt. It’s a great deal. We’ll be arriving there shortly, so hop aboard.”

I carefully placed my hands on the scratchy trunk of the tree. Looking way up to the top, I could barely see Teresa inside the branches and leaves. All I could see of her were two sparkly, brown eyes and a big toothy grin.

“Hurry up or we’ll have to drive over top of you, passenger.”

“Stop calling me passenger!” I wailed, still frightened by the crabby, grabby tree.

“Did you forget my name or something?” Wrapping my arms around the tree trunk, I carefully wedged myself up to the first branch.

“There. I did it.” I said proudly. Beaming with excitement, I sat as stiff as a board on the branch. I barely breathed as I lifted my head slightly. Out from underneath furry eyebrows, I glanced up at Teresa.

“Well – take me to the Team of Cheese Bob!” I demanded.

“That’s the QUEEN of SHEBA, you silly passenger,” Teresa said with disgust. “If you’re not going to play properly, get out of my airplane.”

“Then why did you tell me to get into the stupid airplane in the first place?” I yelled.

Suddenly a big gust of wind blew up under the tree. It pushed the branches and leaves into the sky. I was almost knocked off of my seat. As the branches and leaves settled back down again, another gust of wind blew up. This time the entire tree lifted out of the ground.

We could hear snapping and crackling sounds throughout the whole tree. Crooked branches stretched out in front. The lower branches straightened out to the side and behind us.

All of a sudden, the tree was moving forward. Bending and stretching, the branches lifted the tree and stomped across the lawn. Big, dark, scratchy limbs waved in the air. SNAP! SNAP! The outer branches snapped together like big pincers.

"TERESAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!" I wailed. "The crab is going to eat us!" I tried to scramble from my seat, but I stopped dead. I realized that if I jumped out of my seat, I would be on the ground. The crab would surely see me.

"TERESAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!" I wailed again. "Save me! The crab is going to eat me."

"Don't be silly, passenger," Teresa explained calmly. "Crabs only eat apples. That's why we have crab apple trees."

The leaves rattled as the crab's limbs began to thrash around me. "Please don't eat me," I whined with fear. Suddenly, the crab stopped. "Oh no!" I gasped. "It noticed me." Its limbs swirled and swished in the air, as the crab tried to grab me.

SNAP! SNAP! Its pincers tore at my clothes. SNAP! SNAP! It swiped at my arms and head. I banged up against my seat. "Ooooooh," I moaned. This time a crab leg knocked against me sending my body slamming against the other side of my seat.

I couldn't keep my balance any longer. I started falling. Quickly, I tried clutching at my seat hoping to hold on. I grabbed and clawed, but it was no use. It seemed like forever as I flew through the air. I landed on the ground in a flurry of flailing arms.

"The crab!" I thought. I quickly scrambled to my feet ready to run in any direction. When I looked back over my shoulder to see where the crab was going, I gasped. The wind died down the moment I fell from my seat. Now, all that was left behind me was a big, tired old crab apple tree. No legs. No pincers. Just big, scratchy branches swaying slightly back and forth.

"Oh for crying out loud!" Teresa said with disgust. "Are you afraid of the wind, too?"

## Long Ago

In the beginning there was only Lynx (Nodda), Wolverine (Nowe) and the earth with all of its trees, hills, flowers, mountains, grass and water. Nodda and Nowe were sitting cross-legged across from each other by some big oak trees near a lake.

"Hello, Hello," Nowe yelled, "is anybody out there?" There was no answer. Even the wind was quiet. Nowe looked at Nodda. "Lets make something," Nowe said, "I'm bored stiff."

"You mean your business is stiff from not being used," Nodda teased.

"Cut that out," Nowe said, embarrassed. "I'm serious, I want us to invent something."

"Like what?" Nodda said curiously. "Everything has already been made by Beaver, Muskrat, and the big noise."

"How about we make a computer?" Nowe said, springing to his paws.

"A what?" Nodda asked wrinkling his eyebrows.

"A machine that will help us make things," Nowe replied.

Thinking about it, Nodda exclaimed, "That would be a good thing to make!"

He jumped on his hind legs and rubbed his furry face, "But who will use this thing you call computer?"

"We will, you dummy," Nowe said, "This computer will help us to make T.V., radio, clock, remote control, vehicles, phones, answering machines, and the list goes on."

"Stop, Stop," cried Nodda, "Who will use all these things you speak about?"

Nowe, annoyed with Nodda's ignorance slapped him on the side of the head.

"You're such a duh," Nowe said ticked off. "These things we will make for our children and for us to better communicate with each other."

"Our children?" Nodda said excitedly, "you mean we're going to have kids."

"Why do you think the man upstairs gave us our business? To look at?" Nowe said sarcastically. "Of course we're going to have kids."

Blushing, Nodda looked down at his business. "I'm going to make lots of kids all at once," Nodda said.

"Not me," Nowe said, "I'm going to make them one at a time so that I can teach them all I know."

"That kid of yours will be pretty smart then," Nodda said jealously. "Yep! Just like me," Nowe said, smiling proudly.

"Me too, I'll have one kid at a time," Nodda said.

"You can't change your mind like that," growled Nowe. "You said you were going to have lots of kids and that's the way it has to be."

"According to who?" Nodda snarled. "Who made you boss anyway?"

"The man upstairs, who else?" Nowe said, sticking his hairy chest out.

"He made us both boss," whined Nodda.

"Not according to this book." Nowe picked up a weathered, yellow stained book from behind the tree.

Nodda laughed at the sight of the book. "That book is so stained with your piss that I bet you can't make what the words say."

"Don't you dare insult my intelligence," Nowe snapped, irritated.

Hearing this, Nodda only laughed harder at Nowe who was trying really hard to read the stained pages.

"There is more than one way to skin a cat," shrieked Nowe.

"What was that?" Nodda snapped back.

"None of your business," returned Nowe who put on a pair of reading glasses. He glared at Nodda and attacked him. Their fur flew in all directions. A loud voice yelled, "What the hell do you think you two are doing?"

Nowe, who was about to give Nodda another swat, stopped his hands in mid air. Deviously he said, "We weren't fighting, we were playing."

"Nowe is...," Nodda never got a chance to say, 'beating me up,' Nowe crammed his clawed paw into Nodda's mouth.

"If you say anything I don't like, I'm going to knock you out with my piss. It's powerful medicine!" Nowe whispered.

Nodda, scared to death of Nowe's smell, said, "I won't say anything. I promise with all my heart."

"What was that," the big voice roared.

"Nothing," Nodda and Nowe said in harmony.

"Get back to work then," the big voice said, "and if I get interrupted again by your foolishness I will have to separate both of you."

Bowing their heads to the ground Nodda and Nowe apologized to the big voice for aggravating him.

"You did good," Nowe said to Nodda patting him on the head, "you saved my skin and for that you can help me make the computer and the phone and all that stuff."

"What will the phone do?" Nodda asked.

"Do I have to tell you how everything works," Nowe groaned. "Look it up in the dictionary; maybe you'll learn something."

Tears welled up in Nodda's yellow eyes.

"What are you crying about?" Nowe asked, rolling his eyes back.

"I'm crying because I don't know anything about T.V., phone, vehicle, or computer."

"Come off it," Nowe said. "Do you think I know anymore than you do? I've been using my creative mind and my god-given instincts to come up with this stuff."

Nodda glared at Nowe. The tears in his eyes dried up. "Here I thought all along I had no brain."

"Who told you that?" Nowe said breaking out into a chuckle.

"You."

"Me?" Nowe asked innocently. "I wouldn't do such a thing."

Nodda was about to say something but Nowe cut him off.

"Let's call the area where the computer remembers everything, the brain."

Jumping around excitedly Nodda said, "That's a superb idea, and let's give it a tail. We'll call it mouse and I can chase it when I want to play instead of fighting with you."

"Now you're thinking," Nowe said, clapping his paws together and jumping around.

"I know what else we can make," Nodda said, getting caught up in the excitement. "A microwave."

"What's that?" Nowe said.

"It's a machine that can thaw, cook, heat things," Nodda said. Dollar signs began to roll in Nodda's head. He was real happy with himself for coming up with a new invention before Nowe did.

"And we can make freezer, fridge, coffee makers, and all the things our wives will need in the kitchen," Nodda meowed. He shook with excitement.

"Ya, that's a good idea," Nowe said. He was becoming jealous because Nodda was coming up with more inventions than him. Just wait till after all these things are made, Nowe thought. Nodda will be my guinea pig. I'll experiment on him. A big smile crossed his face.

"What are you grinning about, Nowe?" Nodda asked. "I bet you're scheming up something to out do me."

"I was just thinking about what I can make, now that you've come up with everything to create," Nowe said.

"And what have you decided on?" Nodda said, walking around in a cir-

cle with his paws behind his back, thinking of what else to make.

"I'm still thinking. Something will come to me that needs to be invented."

"Don't blow a fuse," teased Nodda. "I wouldn't want you making things if you're not all there."

"Don't upset me," Nowe said, "I don't want to have to get mad and scratch your beady eyes out."

"I'm only joking around," Nodda said, "don't take everything so seriously."

"You're right," Nowe said, "I have to work on that. Now let's get to work making things."

On the first day Nowe and Nodda made the computer. They both worked on different projects making all the electronic things we now see. They worked non-stop for six full days and nights.

On the seventh day they stopped working and saw all that they had built.

"I'm exhausted!" Nodda exclaimed.

"Go to sleep then," Wolverine said. "While you're sleeping I'll fine-tune all these things we made and make sure they're all working properly."

"Be careful," Nodda said in between yawns, "don't get yourself electrocuted."

"Don't worry, I'm Nowe, remember? The smart one, I know what I'm doing."

Going under the shade of the tree Nodda laid down.

"I'll turn the radio on," Nowe said. "The music will help you go to sleep faster."

"Sure thing," Nodda said, closing his eyes. The Eagles came through the air waves, singing, "Peaceful easy feeling."

"Boy, that sure is an honest song," Nodda said, half asleep, "Those birds sure know how to sing."

"Yep, that's a good song to sleep to," Nowe said.

Once Nodda was fast asleep Nowe wet him down in the lake and put him in the microwave to dry off. Nowe wanted to test how well the microwave worked. Just about that time Nodda had a dream. In it he was getting it on with a woman. He was getting really hot. His heart was pounding really hard. He was about to drop his leggings when his ears popped.

"Hey!" Nodda screamed waking up. "Get me the hell out of here, my heart is about to jump out of my chest and stop!"

Nowe laughed as he watched Nodda squirm around. Finally, he let him

out of the microwave. Sweat was pouring down Nodda.

"How did you like that sweat? Did you have a vision?" Nowe said in between gulps of laughter.

"You stinking rat," Nodda snarled, "I could have died inside that microwave. You're not to put living things like me inside microwaves. It's dangerous!"

"I had to find out how it works," Nowe said, lowering his head. "Are you okay?"

Checking himself over Nodda said, "Everything is in its place. Now let me go back to sleep."

While Nodda slept Nowe lit the Barbeque. I wonder what would happen if I put Nodda on top of it? Nowe thought. I bet he'll keep sleeping. Very gently he lifted Nodda from the ground and set him on top of the Barbecue. For a while nothing happened. Then all of a sudden Nodda let out a scream of fright.

"I'm on fire!" he shrieked. "Nowe, help me."

Nowe, who had gone to the lake, turned and ran toward Nodda. "Oh, my goodness what have I done?" he said.

"Get the fire extinguisher!" Nowe yelled

Nodda, jumped around patting himself. He tried to stop the flames from burning his sensitive skin.

Nowe ran, got the fire extinguisher and doused the flames out.

"Look at my fur," groaned Nodda, "it's been all singed!"

"You'll grow soft fur back," Nowe said, trying to reassure Nodda. "It will look even better than before because it's been burned."

"It better grow," Nodda said very angry, "If it doesn't I'll freeze my ass off this winter and you'll be to blame."

Nowe, worried about what he done to Nodda, tried to make things better. "Why don't you have yourself a sun tan under that tanning bed now that your hair is almost all gone."

"That's a good idea. I need to get myself back together before I get really mad and do something I will regret later on," Nodda said, taking a deep breath. "Nowe play that Eagles on that CD machine for me. I sure like their tunes."

Nowe looked over all the CD tapes they made but he couldn't find the Eagles. "The Eagles must have flocked off. How about some Black Crows?" Nowe yelled.

"What kind of music is that?" asked Nodda.

"Rock and Roll," said Nowe, "You'll like it. It will make you want to

dance.”

“I want to relax, get some sleep,” Nodda said between clenched teeth. “I don’t want to be bouncing all over the country, I’m tired. You understand!”

“Hey, that word bouncing makes me think of something you never invented,” cried Nowe excitedly.

“What now?” Nodda shot back frustrated.

“A ball.”

“A what?” Nodda said, “What good is a ball in this world where everything is electric?”

“We need to play games you know. We can play things like volleyball, basketball, tennis, golf. It will pass the time away.”

“You’re something,” Nodda said cutting his tanning session short to go lay under the tree again. “You don’t fail to amaze me.”

“What do you expect? I’m Nowe,” Nowe said, shaking his skinny hips to the song ‘Jealous Again.’

“I like the crows singing better than them sleepy eagles,” Nowe said, snapping his fingers to the song blasting on the CD player.

“Nowe, shut that music down and let me get some sleep! If I don’t get sleep, I’m going to have black bags under my eyes,” Nodda said. “Nowe, I beg you please, let me get some zzz’s for just a little while.”

“That’s no problem,” Nowe said, “just go to sleep, don’t let me bother you. I’ll just make myself some coffee on that electric coffee maker and think about how to make these different kind of balls.”

“Ya, whatever,” Nodda said as he closed his eyes. Happy to be finally getting some rest at long last, Nodda didn’t think about tucking in his long tail in between his legs. He had just gone back into a new dream when he felt tingling going up his leg. Alarmed he woke up. He looked at his tail and it was plugged into an electric outlet.

“Oh, my god!” screamed Nodda. “My tail is being electrocuted!”

“Pull yourself away from it,” hollered Nowe.

Still half asleep Nodda obeyed Nowe’s command. He ripped his tail. Only a short stump was left.

“Nowe, look at what you’ve done to me,” Nodda said in a rage.

“Don’t worry about that tail of yours. It will grow back with your fur,” Nowe said.

“It better, or else hell will break loose.”

“You threatening me?” Nowe said raising his eyebrows.

“Yep, and don’t forget it,” Nodda snarled, showing off his yellow-

stained teeth.

“Whatever you say,” Nowe said smiling and showing off his bright white teeth which he just cleaned with Colgate.

Nowe finally made the balls to play with. He and Nodda played golf everyday for a couple of hours. They got into fights over who won the game. Nodda would come back from the games limping, scratched up or bleeding. One day Nodda decided to get even with Nowe. The only thing he knew was that he has enough of Nowe’s beatings. He’d do something but he didn’t know what. He got himself some tea and sat under the tree to think. Along came Mosquito.

“Where did you come from?” Nodda asked, “Nobody made you.”

“I made myself,” buzzed Mosquito.

“Well, since you’re here, you might as well help me out-trick Nowe.”

“What has he done to you that you’re so upset about?” Mosquito asked.

“Look at me,” complained Nodda, “I have dark circles under my eyes and I’m about to have a nervous break down. If something is not done about that Nowe be prepared to put me in a straight jacket and send me off to a looney bin.”

“Hey, tell me your troubles,” Mosquito murmured.

“You wouldn’t believe what that monster has been doing to me,” cried Nodda as tears fell down his face. “First he tried to cook me in that microwave, then he singed my fur on that Barbeque, then he electrocuted my tail, thinking it was the coffee maker’s plug in. Look how short it is now,” Nodda said showing of his rear end to Mosquito. “There’s hardly anything left.”

“I can see that,” Mosquito said, shaking his head.

“He then chased me around the golf course with that golf buggy until I collapsed,” continued Nodda. “Then he used his golf clubs on me. Beat me while I was out cold. He also chased me around the earth with electric things from the kitchen. I can tell you how big this earth is if you want to know,” Nodda exclaimed, half out of breath.

“No, it’s okay You can tell me later when you’re under better control.”

“Nowe has to be stopped! He’s a danger to society.”

“You’re not kidding,” Mosquito said, becoming concerned for his own safety. “I can sting him real good, paralyze him and you can tie him up with sinew and we can send him far away.”

“Where on this earth can we put him where he won’t escape?”

Thinking about the question Mosquito said, “I know, I know,” his eyes bulging with fire. “We can put him inside a video machine!”

“That’s a good idea!” exclaimed Nodda. Unaware of his injuries he sprung up and down on his legs saying, “Yes! Yes! Mosquito, I didn’t realize your smarts were this good!”

”I’m Mosquito, what do you expect!” Mosquito said, grinning from ear to ear.

So it went. Nowe was captured and stopped from hurting Nodda.

You can still hear Nowe howl from video games asking you to challenge him. You have to watch that Nowe. He’ll try and beat you at every turn.

## Celebration

## jeff low is a fag

jeff low  
jeff low is a fag  
jeff low is  
a fag  
jeff low is  
jeff low is a fag

what does  
jeff low is a fag  
mean and who wrote it and why  
in an alley  
on the back of the 7-11?  
on one brown cinder block  
jeff low is a fag  
not on a bus shelter or side walk  
but an alley  
hidden  
cowardly  
if i circle the building  
from behind  
i will hear  
jeff low is a fag

words like injured eagles  
whisper  
and fall cold on that brown wall

don't they?

did graffiti joe  
or jane  
want jeff low to hurt?  
did they believe they had disclosed  
pried  
from the way he walked or talked or cared  
or thought  
these midnight-hunter words  
jeff low is a fag

did joe or jane think

that people who walk this alley  
will deliver jeff low into the shadow of death?  
did they imagine young couples who read this  
will laugh and point and say  
    jeff low is a fag?

will jeff low's friends see it  
and refuse to speak to him  
sit with him or love him?

will jeff low read it?  
suddenly he is my little brother  
and there are things  
rainbow things  
queer-bashing things  
truthful things  
i want to tell him

then i wonder  
is jeff low a fag?  
what if he is  
and he wrote it?  
maybe he did write it  
small at first (in  
contained  
precise letters)  
practiced  
dipped and dipped a safety pin from cheap ink  
to his skin and back again  
tattooed  
his dharma  
on the inside of his left thigh  
JEFF LOW IS A FAG

maybe he's sitting in his bedroom  
right now  
screaming in his head  
    jeff low is a fag  
    jeff low is a fag  
    jeff low is a fag  
    jeff low is a fag  
sixteen years old and afraid

to come out  
of his room  
because jeff low is a fag  
maybe he's crying into his pillow  
barely able to draw breath  
snot and tears choking him  
and still he's whispering  
    jeff low is a fag

afraid his father will find him  
throw him out for crying  
afraid he'll lose his brothers  
afraid  
he's lost his manhood  
afraid  
jeff low is a fag  
*please god*  
*kill me*

but maybe no god listens to crying fags  
in the middle of the day or night  
so jeff low gets up the next morning  
and goes to school  
knowing, only him, knowing  
that jeff low is a fag  
and his face will be placid  
like a windless lake  
waiting, aching, to be broken  
in the morning light

walking to school  
walking  
jeff low realizes his horizon is on fire  
his sun  
    is begging  
    to rise  
and the only way his day will break  
is if he slyly writes his secret sacred words  
on the brown wall  
jeff low is a fag

maybe jeff low is the fag who wrote

jeff low is a fag  
maybe he wrote after  
cruising the beach  
teasing a man  
tugging him along  
until they were alone  
kissing and sucking  
behind the 7-11  
maybe the stranger did up his pants  
looked at jeff low once  
and walked away  
left jeff low standing there  
with a secret he smiles to himself to keep  
his peacock back arched  
creaking leather jacket  
slung low on his shoulders  
fishnet stockings under his blue jeans  
hand on his hip  
lips licked  
head back  
smug  
even a little superior  
as he proclaims  
jeff low is a fag

i hope

i return to the alley  
where jeff low is a fag  
four nights later  
take out a permanent black magic marker  
and next to jeff low is a fag  
i write  
    thank god

## Drum Dance

People are gathering  
in a festival of fun  
Faces smile, laughs begun  
A circle has formed  
from a beat, that's sung  
Everyone's happy  
Everything's right on  
No hard feelings  
Just dancing all night long

Children playing, elders chanting  
The sun has fallen, the moon is shining  
The cool air arrives  
Everyone's dancing

Don't care what they say  
I'm going to stomp my feet  
Going to sweat all night  
'Cause, the beat of the drum  
Says, "Dance Tonite"

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## Excerpt from Letter

I'm discovering that I fill more with anger than humour: – I didn't realize how hard and how long I've been fighting the modern world's persistent and distracting insistence on the material, the superficial appearance of spiritual, – that talk without walking, or even feeling, – like hiding gangrene with make-up and lipstick while attacking the medicine that would help it heal.

I realize now how very sacred is the clown who provides a path for the force of my anger to go towards persistence and survival. Without this, my anger would turn to poison, I'm sure

May you laugh 'til you dance and dance 'til you laugh!

---

## medicine-n-magic

at the end of the earth  
medicine sat in her office  
wishing she were home, close  
to her people  
laughing easily

“it's wild onion season”  
she thought  
boiled meat, posole,  
commodity cheese, canned peaches  
fry bread... simple stuff,  
she never dreamed she  
would miss

the previous night  
she had finished reading  
a story written by one of  
her peers,  
funny sad  
fortunately she didn't grow  
up in an alcohol infested home  
like the writer reported

mom always said  
“anyone can drink themselves  
to death... doesn't matter what  
race they belong to... wasting talent  
time...  
it's the smart ones who  
rise and meet the demands  
of their spirit  
they are the ones  
we can all be proud of..”

mom also cautioned medicine  
about gossip and vulgar language

“don’t mentally retard yourself  
with bad words” she would say

her mother didn’t necessarily  
sit down and say those things  
all at once, they came in pieces  
of events, comments made while  
medicine was still nesting  
not knowing she would one day  
be sitting at the rim of  
the gulf of mexico, blending  
those words together. wisdom  
to help her as she looked  
for magic

magic shook her hand one day  
it was that simple, only magic  
didn’t tell her he was magic  
he disguised himself with  
common words. they were working  
on a project together

magic reserved his laugh  
for what was truly funny  
his smile  
for what was truly true  
only he tripped one day

asking medicine a stereotyped  
question about indians, medicine  
had grown weary of such  
questions, especially that day,  
the week before her moon was  
particularly hazardous for  
foolish inquiry

magic in his smugness, chortled  
his half-wit question

innocently  
medicine seized  
the words, chewed them  
thoroughly  
spat them back like  
chipped flint  
knocking magic  
on his  
buns

he got up  
shook the flint  
dust off  
waited for  
the mood to settle  
then took cover

medicine felt bad, for taking  
advantage of the situation  
in pre-moon cycle, striking  
where she knew she had no  
challenge. she had been warned  
many times during her life  
not to use her medicine on the  
weak and easy, “the ones that  
have no defense, they’re the ones  
you should help and be kind to...”

the worst part was  
she had no time to explain  
the attack  
and lessons magic should  
have carried off  
with him  
that was the worst  
there was nothing  
gained

medicine wore this cheap victory  
around her heart, ashamed, she  
had to make amends

magic, keeping his distance  
but always respectful  
was afraid of her

one day, the project needed  
attention, medicine needed help  
she would ask magic, she  
asked him for support in helping  
her, magic afraid to say yes,  
said "yes," but was thinking  
"oh no!"

the project prospered, and all  
were amazed at magic and  
medicine, then one day, medicine  
recognized magic  
the south sea sun melted away  
the common words  
as he spoke

he was no longer afraid of her  
but had grown afraid for himself  
that he would lose her

she promised he would never  
lose her and the sky gasped  
periwinkle hues  
medicine became magic  
and magic became medicine  
the spirits rose, huffing  
zipping, puffing, zagging  
singing, and finally settling  
over the salty wet earth  
with a great  
sigh

## banned in canada

( is (an attempt a  
( wound) a stab:  
( the word is out  
( loud on the town  
( can't shut it up or  
( shut it down  
( repression is just some noun  
( and resistance  
( a word  
( unless you speak  
( the language of the land  
( cause the word is out  
( and my breath is hot  
( on the future's ear  
( and my finger's fast  
( on the past's clitoris  
( immoral sex acts  
( performed here:  
( listening to the past  
( speaking to the future  
( woman to woman

( gathering (words spoken  
( prayers offered  
( breath mingled  
( laughter rolled in the air  
( laughter was banned  
( the band was banned  
( but the Nation rolls on  
( ceremonies still breathe  
( and the word still spoken)  
( was banned

( rocks don't break  
( waves do  
( rocks don't break  
( waves do  
( resistance is a rock  
( worn smooth  
( like turtle's back

## Art

“Hi,” she said timidly. She was a young Native woman, thin, glasses, holes in her faded jeans. “You have a basement suite for rent?”

We’d remodelled our basement after our son moved out. The basement was just collecting junk anyway. We thought we could make some extra income and possibly help some student. We live three blocks from the Community College. The guys at work with suites had warned me not to rent to a single young female. “You’ll have guys coming and going all times of the day and night. And parties and loud music to drive you insane. You’ll think you’re in an asylum. Or wish you were.”

My first impulse was to say no. But she looked like a quiet person, mousy, someone who read a lot. And there was something vulnerable about her large brown eyes, and faded clothes that clouded my better judgement. “Yes,” I heard myself say, looking out to see what kind of car she was driving. She’d walked. “Would you like to see it?” I asked with a friendly smile.

“Please,” she smiled bravely.

I took her downstairs, and soon as she saw the suite she asked, “How much?” Her back was to me, but I’ll bet her eyes were closed and fingers crossed, because she appeared to be cringing. I wondered how many times she had been turned down. “Ten thousand dollars a month if you’re a party person,” I said smiling. “Three hundred dollars if you’re not.”

“I’m not,” she said turning quickly, with a beautiful smile. I was in trouble. I was supposed to rent the suite for four hundred dollars. How would I explain this to my wife? Oh well, we had intended to help some student, didn’t we?

“There will be me and my boyfriend and we both go to school and both work,” she said digging in her purse. “We have no time or money to party.”

“Okay,” I said, extending my hand.

My wife and I were having supper when the young lady returned for the key. I’d told my wife I had rented the suite to a couple of poor kids, and she wasn’t too happy about the rent I’d charged, being a hundred dollars less than what she’d agreed on. When she saw the young Indian couple with their battered suitcases, she turned and went angrily back to the dining room. “Are you crazy?” she hissed when I returned. “Young Indians? Have you completely lost your senses?” “They’re just kids,” I said lamely, her total lack of confidence magnified my own misgivings tenfold. These kids

couldn’t have been long off the reserve; the city could very easily make them crazy.

“They’re going to drink and party, and, burn our house down when we’re sleeping.” She was seething, but she still had presence of mind to keep her voice down.

“They’re both going to school,” I said, not looking at her. “Did you get a damage deposit?” She whispered acidly. Damage deposit? I was new to this landlord business. It had never even occurred to me. I shook my head; my wife jumped up and said very coldly, “I am getting very angry now, and want to be alone.” She stormed into the bedroom. She was using her anger management technique. I hate when she uses it; chosen words not meant to attack or blame for her anger. But I always know I am the reason, and it never fails to make me feel like a big, clumsy fool. Someday I am going to tell her, her techniques really suck. I could hear things banging around in the bedroom; probably my things. Someday I will tell her, I thought determinedly, but not today.

We had never in our lives met a quieter, more eager to please couple than them Indian kids. They were not party people. They went to school all week and worked nights and week-ends. Any time they had off, they stayed downstairs doing what young couples who are apart most of the time do when they get together. At least so I thought. The first time I went down to collect rent, I learned different. They were kind of reluctant to let me in and I know why when I see the table they’re using is not the one we’d bought from the second hand store. Ours had four legs. The one they were using had metal or something wrapped around a third of it all the way to the floor. It looked like a huge, flat topped bill-cap with ear muffs. The front was supported by one big, stove pipe of a leg. They’d shined up the chrome and painted the table and metal wrap, blue and white. It looked like something out of Star Trek, especially in that suite of second-hand store furniture. But it was young, like them: full of life... daring to be different, and bold. The blue and white, the shiny chrome was beautiful. They’d mixed the paint so the top appeared to have depth, with different shades at each level.

“Where’s my table?” I asked, looking around the room.

“Right there,” they both said, pointing at the modified blue and white creation, then looked at one another and giggled nervously. “If you don’t like it we’ll pay you for it when we leave, and take it with us.” The girl said apologetically.

“No, no, no.” I said, “It looks fine. I like it.”

I went back upstairs chuckling, and said to the wife. "You should see what them kids did to our table and chairs. It's amazing. They must be artists."

"They're not artists fool," my wife said with a superior air; not even bothering to lift her head up from her crocheting.

"She's studying to be a dental assistant, and he's working at appliance repair."

"How do you know that?" I asked, "I thought you were afraid of them."

"Afraid?" She said. Now she looked up, and even had the nerve to sound incredulous. "They're just kids."

I shook my head at her audacity, and said: "Well, it's still amazing. That old table set looks a lot happier now than it did when we brought it home. When did you talk to them?"

"She comes up, and uses our phone sometimes."

Several weeks later I was out working in my garden, and the young man was adjusting the brake cables on his bike preparing to go to work when his girl friend came walking home from her job. She went immediately over to her boy friend to show him a small painting she was carrying. "Got this at a garage sale down the street: pretty, huh?" She said smugly.

He glanced up at it uninterestedly, and said "If you say so."

"How much did you pay?" He asked again, and I was beginning to feel embarrassed for her.

"Not much," she said gaily, studying the picture. She held it out to me and said "Nice eh?"

I nodded and smiled, "At least you can tell what it is without going cross-eyed."

She turned back to her boyfriend, and seeing his serious expression said, "Oh, five bucks, you skinflint. Is that too much?" He didn't answer, but kept his head down and smiled as he worked on his bike. His girlfriend went angrily into the house and he made an impudent smile at her back for me to see.

The next time I go down, I see they have the fridge apart and are sanding the pieces. The second-hand fridge was a lot more expensive than the table and chairs, but I'm not too concerned; my wife did say the guy was studying appliance repair. And if they do a job like they did on the table and chairs, hell, I was way ahead.

"They got the fridge apart," I said to my wife with a chuckle when I got back upstairs.

"Yah, I know," she said matter-of-factly. "They dropped the door when

they took it off... made a hell of a racket. I thought they were drunk and fighting, so I went down there to see what they were doing. They're going to paint it silver." She said it like she didn't really approve, but was powerless to stop them. Lord knows what they would turn into if provoked.

"Silver!" I said surprised.

"Silver," she said with a hint of frustration. "She gets a deal on paint where she works, and they don't paint with brushes." I raised my eyebrows questioningly.

"They use rags, sponges, Saran Wrap and God knows what all. I think you should have a talk with them."

"Well, if that's how they painted the table, I'm sure the fridge will look okay," I said with an effort to sound positive. "I can always paint it over."

My wife stared sternly at me over the top of her glasses while her fingers continued to rapidly crochet with eyes of their own. "They're probably lonely," I said with an evasive shrug, "and are trying to bring something of their home here."

"You'll stop them if they start to carve the house supports into totem poles eh?" She said cynically.

Two weeks later my wife phones me at work and tells me the young guy downstairs was in an accident and was in the hospital. My first thought when my wife said accident was, 'Oh no, my fridge is still all apart.' To this day, that remembrance brings me pain, and I try to justify the miserly, self-centred thought by telling myself over and over that I did not know how serious the boy was.

That night we waited for the young woman to come home, and when she walked into the yard; I tell you solemnly, I have never in my life seen such a sad sight. From the top of her head to the soles of her shoes, everything was drooping. I never realized just how small and thin she was till that moment. She was crying. The wife and I go out to meet her, and I was feeling sorer at that moment than I had ever felt before. These kids had nothing but each other. My wife was crying too as we practically carried the young lady into the house.

The young man hung on for three weeks. After he died the young lady came up and said very bravely. "I'll be leaving at the end of the month." "You can stay as long as you want." My wife said, surprising me. "You don't have to pay the rent if you can't afford it."

"Thank you," the young lady said sadly, "But I can't stay here alone." She looked up at me with pain filled eyes, then away. "We meant it about

the rent." I said sympathetically, her agony making my voice soft.

"Thank you," she said again, her face twisting with emotion, "You're very kind, but I can't."

"Okay," I said. "But you stay just as long as you like."

She left the same way she'd come, Kathrina Stonebreaker, walking, carrying two old suitcases, in faded ripped clothes. My wife and I heart broken, watched her go, wishing fervently there was something we could do. "She slept on the floor beside the old fridge and her boyfriend's tools," my wife said sorrowfully, wiping her eyes. "She wouldn't sleep in the bed." I put an arm around her to console. Kathrina stopped and looked back, but not at us, at the windows of the basement suite. Then she turned, and walked out of our lives forever.

It was several days before I had reason to go downstairs. And when I did go, I was given quite a shock. The part of the fridge that wasn't shiny, tin foil silver, was swirls of deep, dark, midnight black. Like clouds of forbidding pain the swirls grew blacker and blacker, coming up from the bottom threatening to overrun the bright silver. Whirling, out of control darkness, a maelstrom of hopelessness, dejection, anger and mourning.

Like unbearable suffering completely exposed, the fridge though strangely appealing, was hard for me to look at; something divine, yet terrible.

They say art develops normally according to the laws of nature, and must respond to human needs, or humans response to it. Everyone who sees the fridge, and the space-age table and chairs smiles favourably, and must comment on them. I have yet to hear one bad word. One student said I had a miniature art gallery for a suite. Whenever I hear the word 'Art,' I see a thin, young lady, their room, their joy and her sadness, intertwined in an old second-hand store fridge.

## DAY OF SUN

(In memory of Simone "Loon Song" Horn)

We in a circle  
honouring memory  
mourning passing  
praying silence...

She laughs at us  
this Sunday for being so sad.  
Laughs through Spirit  
I am here! Can't you see me?  
Can't you hear me? Can't you feel me?  
Singing through the trees  
dancing through the drums.

I am here!  
As always  
only now free as  
you shall all be one day  
free to laugh through Spirit  
sing through crows  
talk through trees  
and dance through drums.

We in a circle  
laughing singing talking dancing  
together or always  
together or all ways.

## Biographies

**Annette Arkeketa:** Annette (Otoe-Creek) grew up around Tulsa, Oklahoma. She has been published in numerous anthologies, including *Gatherings VII*. Annette currently lives in Corpus Christi, Texas.

**Jeannette Armstrong:** Jeannette is a member of the Penticton Indian Band; Okanagan Nation. She teaches Okanagan Studies and Okanagan Language. She is also the Director of the En'owkin International School of Writing.

**Marie Annharte Baker:** Band # N42-Little Saskatchewan First Nations, now twice the granny, moved to Vancouver to go to Simon Fraser University to take up art Education, plus do MOC TALK, "we mock the'h talk to walk the talk" on Co-op radio, literary art crit segment, but part time day job is teaching English at Native Education Centre a.k.a. "Forrest's mother" and by the way, Anishinabekwe.

**Susan M. Beaver:** Susan is Mohawk from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory and a member of the wolf clan. She's published sporadically, here and there, but has big plans. She says ny:weh to all the Indigenous writers that have gone before her.

**Don Birchfield:** Don is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and a graduate of the University of Oklahoma College of Law. His 10,000 word essay, Choctaw Nation is in the 1995 *GALE Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*.

**Kimberly Blaeser:** Kimberly (Anishinaabe) currently an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, is an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and grew up on White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota. Her publications include *Trailing You*, which won the Diane Decorah First Book Award for poetry from the Native Writer's Circle of the Americas, and Gerald Vizenor: *Writing in the Oral Tradition*, a critical study. Blaeser's fiction, poetry, personal essays, and scholarly articles have also been anthologized in numerous Canadian and American collections including: *Earth Song*, *Sky Spirit*, *The Colour of Resistance*, *Women on Hunting*, *Returning the Gift*, *Blue Dawn*, *Red Earth*, *Dreaming History*, *Durable Breath*, *Narrative Chance*, *Unsettling America*, and *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*.

**Trevor Cameron:** Trevor is a Metis who calls Vancouver his home. He is an independent filmmaker and writer with a certificate of recommendation in film making from the Vancouver Film School. Trevor is a former student of the En'owkin International School of Writing.

**Bill Cohen:** Bill is an Okanagan artist and teacher who lives in Penticton, BC., where he teaches at the En'owkin Centre.

**Crystal Lee Clark:** Crystal was born in Fort McMurray, AB, on December 7, 1974. She has many bloods from Sonny and Gail. Crystal loves Art and is proud to be a part of the En'owkin Centre where a lot of really cool people are.

**Sherida Crane:** Sherida is from Siksika, Alberta, Blackfoot Nation. Sherida is a former student of the En'owkin International School of Writing.

**Jack D. Forbes:** Jack Forbes is professor and former chair of Native American Studies at the University of California at Davis, where he has served since 1969. He is of Powhatan/Renape, Delaware/Lenape ancestry. He received his Ph.D from the University of Southern California in 1959. Forbes was born at Bahia de los Alamitos in Suanga (Long Beach) California in 1934. Professor Forbes has served as a Visiting Fulbright Professor at the University of Warwick, England, as the Tinbergen Chair at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, as a Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Social Anthropology of Oxford University, and as a Visiting Professor in Literature at the University of Essex, England. His latest book *Red Blood* has been published by Theytus Books.

**Barb Frazer:** Barb is from Pilot Butte, Saskatchewan and is a former student of En'owkin International School of Writing. She is currently attending the Centre for Indigenous Environment Resources in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**William George:** William is from the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (also known as Burrard Indian Band) in North Vancouver, BC. He lives and writes in the Okanagan. William has been published in Anthologies, Literary Magazines and Theytus Books publications *Gatherings Journal Volumes III, IV, V and VII*.

**Barbara- Helen Hill:** Helen is from Six Nations, Grand River Territory, located in Southern Ontario. She is a graduate of the En'owkin International School of Writing. Helen is pursuing a BFA in Creative Writing.

**Inés Hernández-Ávila:** I am Nez Perce on my mom's side, enrolled on the Colville Reservation in Washington state, and Chicana/Mexican Indian on my dad's side. I write poetry, fiction (often using both English and Spanish), and I teach a class called Native American Literature in Performance, where my students and I select pieces by Native writers to adapt to stage, and then produce the performances on our campus. I am the Chair of the Department of Native American studies at the University of California, Davis. My scholarly fields of interest include Native American women's literature, Native American religious traditions, Native American and Chicana cultural studies Native American and Chicana feminisms.

**Joyce B. Joe:** Joyce was born in Victoria, BC, in 1948. She is a member of the Penelakut Tribe and was born into the hereditary Chiefs' families of the Thomas's (father) and the Johnsons (mother) at Ditidaht, BC. Joyce writes poetry, scripts and

prose. She is currently instructing Creative Writing at the En'owkin International School of Writing. Her latest publication is an anthology entitled *West Coast Line Magazine* and includes an excerpt from her 29 Line Poems collections. Her full length play *Ravens* was produced by Native Earth (Toronto) in 1996.

**Sandra Lynn Lynxleg:** Sandra presently lives in Merritt, BC. She is of Saulteaux, Irish, Scottish, and English ancestry. She is from the Valley River First Nations in Manitoba. She is 36 years old, married for 14 years, and is a mother of three children. Sandra presently works at an Aboriginal college (Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt, BC). She began writing five years ago and discovered her talent for writing from many mentors (family, NVIT, NITEP, IASO). Sandra was selected as an IASO participant in the 1996 B.C. Festival of the Arts, in Powell River, BC.

**Sarah D. Lyons:** Sarah is a mixed blood of Isletan, Pueblo descent. A political activist, she has helped to build America's emergent movement towards the establishment of an inclusive, democracy based, major third party. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York and works as a word processor at a law firm.

**Jeffrey Mantla:** I am 19 years old and a grade 12 student attending Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School. I have written many songs, stories and poems. Poetry is my main passion since I first picked up a pen. I was born in Yellowknife, NWT. I lived in a small town called Wha-Ti with a population of 500. I travelled to different places and wrote about everyday occurrences that stumble into my life. I would like to dedicate these writings to my family and friends.

**MariJo Moore:** MariJo is an Eastern Cherokee and resides in Asheville, NC. MariJo is a staff writer for *Indian Artist* magazine and free-lancer for publications including *National Geographic*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, and *Native Women in the Arts*. She is the author of *Returning to the Homeland-Cherokee Poetry and Short Stories*, *Crow Quotes*, *Stars Are Birds and Other Writings*, and *Spirit Voices of Bones*.

**Jacqueline Oker:** Jacqueline is a Beaver Indian from the Doig River Reserve. (Doig is located 40 miles from Fort St. John, BC). Jackie is a former Creative Writing student at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, BC, and is in the process of writing a book of poems. She is a mother of two children and is currently in her third year of Social work with University of Victoria.

**Stephen Pranteau:** I was born in Grand Rapids, Manitoba. My first language is Cree. Cree allows people to be lively and boisterous without being obnoxious. People can poke fun at each other without any disrespect. I learned about humour from original and very funny story tellers. It was impossible not to laugh even during solemn occasions such as funerals. It is because of them that I try to write some

amusing stories and still try to deal with survival. I don't believe that everything has to be full of solemnity while making observations on life. Not everyone can or needs to make a profound statement. Others can make genuine observations of life whether they are young or old or just trying to be entertaining.

**M.C. Poirier:** Mickie Poirier is a self-taught artist, and been painting since 1987, using what she has learned in photography, emcology, botany and ornithology to enhance her art. Mickie is an Algonquin Metis from Maniwake, Quebec, born December 16, 1947. Mickie is of the Native Alliance, Kitchener, Ontario.

**Sharron Proulx-Turner:** Sharron is from Calgary, Alberta, and is a member of the Metis Nation of Alberta (Mohawk, Huron, Algonquin, Ojibwa, French and Irish ancestors). She is currently awaiting publication of her second book, which is a book of poetry, *she is reading her blanket with her hands*.

**Bindi Ritchie:** Bindi is a member of the Katzie Indian Band from the Fraser Valley of BC. She is working toward an Associate of Arts Degree from the Okanagan University College. As well, Bindi is currently a student at the En'owkin International School of Writing.

**Anna Marie Sewell:** Anna is a halfbreed who wanders the world saying, "wow, cool." And then she marvels that serious people look at her askance. She feels a deep, nigh-totemic affinity for bannock, dandelions and her black seventies ashtray with the roaring panther, 'flash', on it. She lives in a basement, with flash and other friends, and invents oatmeal recipes with regularity.

**Drew Hayden Taylor:** Drew has been called one of Canada's leading Native Dramatists. his comedy *The Bootlegger Blues* won the Canadian Authors Award for Drama and his most recent play *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* earned him a Dora Award for most outstanding new play in 1995. His plays have been produced in Canada, the U.S. and Europe. In addition to writing for stage and screen, Taylor has contributed essays and commentaries to the *Globe & Mail*, *The Toronto Star* and *This Magazine*. He is currently writing a television movie for CBC. Taylor is an Ojibway from the Curve Lake Reserve in Ontario – even if he doesn't look like it.

**Vera Wabegijig:** Vera is from Blind River, Ontario and is currently a student at the En'owkin International School of Writing.

**Sabrina Whane:** I am 16 years old. I like to be with my friends.

**Other Contributors:**

Linda George  
Ken Gervais

Leanne Flett-Kruger  
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