



Chi-Noodin

Native American community writers group

We Write for Ourselves

Issue two



*Insights and stories from
The Chi-Noodin writing group*

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

The Community Writing Project hosts writing workshops for people who ordinarily do not consider themselves to be writers and publishes their reflections on everyday life. We are particularly interested in the creative expressions and unique understandings of those who have been relegated to the margins of society, including the poor, the oppressed, immigrants, and those who risk their privileges to join them.

We Write for Ourselves

Issue Two

Issue #2 (2012)

©2012 *Chi-Noodin* Writing Group with the Community Writing Project

Introduction

For over a year now the Chi-noodin writing group has been meeting on Fridays at the Kateri Center, a Ministry of the Chicago Archdiocese serving Chicago's American Indians. Most Fridays the group meets in the ample dining and meeting area just off the kitchen. The bustling sounds of meal preparation can be heard through occasional pauses in the group's lively discussions of their writings, or through the near silence at the end of the workshop as participants put pen to paper to draft a new story based on themes that bubble up during discussion. On those Fridays when the center hosts its Indian Taco Sale, the group settles in around a small table in the chapel, adapting the workshop routine to the cozy, dimly lit setting. Most recently, the writing group has been meeting downstairs in the newly refurbished, brightly painted White Cedar Room, surrounded by American Indian books and cultural artifacts.

Wherever the writers meet, they carry with them a collective conviviality, passion for writing, and commitment to "giving voice to the insights of Native American Indians in the city," as writer Dorothy Roy put it. The adaptability of participants to different writing spaces attests to the supportive community the group has formed through sharing and discussing stories that weekly bring tears, laughter, and insights to participants, and through which the group makes the space in which they write their own.

This work of making a place for oneself and finding oneself in a place—and the ways we rely on family, friends and community to do that work—are themes that wind their way through the writings in this issue of the Chi-Noodin magazine. Debra Yepa-Pappan and Lakota Reyna convey the process of discovery or rediscovery of oneself in and in between specific places—in particular the city and the reservation. For Dawn E. Bedell, that place is her garden. In her story, tending to the garden becomes an allegory for cultivating the beauty of her diverse heritage. Raven Roberts, Debra Yepa-Pappan, Janie Pochel, and Justine Pochel recount their defense of their native and multicultural identities over and against the misconceptions and impositions of others in spaces outside their homes such as schools. Georgina Roy, Monica Rickert, and Lakota Reyna recount the discovery and healing of self and others through relationships with family or friends in familiar or new places. Dorothy Roy examines the material circumstances that have framed the struggles of her family to enact, assert, and encounter their identities in relation to an elusive, inaccessible "American Dream." In many ways these stories convey the authors' creative determination to name, resist, or appropriate that American Dream in their own terms, rather than be at the mercy of its oppressive elusiveness.

*—Janise Hurtig, editor
Community Writing Project*

The Writers

Dawn E. Bedell (Ojibwe)

Fawn Pochel (First Nations Cree)

Janie Pochel (First Nations Cree)

Justine Pochel (First Nations Cree)

Lakota Reyna (Lakota)

Monica Rickert (Prairie Band Potawatomi)

Raven Roberts (Prairie Band Potawatomi)

Dorothy Roy (First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng)

Georgina Roy (First Nations Ojibway/M'Chigeeng)

Debra Yepa-Pappan (Jemez Pueblo/Korean)

The Illustrator

Monica Rickert

GEORGINA ROY

Loving Smells

Loving smells that dance in my nose, lodged deep into my mind.
Loving smells of deer meat roasting in its tenth hour, the smells of
hominy soup slowly simmering on an old-fashioned cast iron cook
stove. Even the wood smells dance in my nose. Mom's homemade
lemon blueberry cake baking in the oven. We all knew not to
jump, run, or drop anything while the magic was happening in the
oven. I have never forgotten mom's loving smells.





DAWN E. BEDELL

Home Is In Me

There is a difference between having a house and a home. A person can buy a house, put furniture in it, appliances, decorate it in certain styles but that is really all it is – a well-kept house. A home on the other hand is an accumulation of memories. The personal comforts away from the cruel harsh world. Even the existence of home can be taken for granted when it slowly dissipates with time. People grow old. Teenagers grow up and move out. The aura of family reunions, holiday dinners, and birthdays are the memories we call home. So really now that I think about it, home is in your heart, and a house is just a house.

DOROTHY ROY

The American Dream (Part 1)

The two-tier system prevented my Dad from fulfilling his dream of owning his own business while we were growing up.

He wanted to borrow money to open Lakeshore lots, so he could lease them out. Native American Indians could not get loans. They could not use their land as collateral without a co-signer. This was hard for my dad when he needed to purchase a car or farm equipment. This is where he depended on his best non-Native friend to cosign for him, but I know this was very demeaning for him. A proud man to be reduced to such a low, to ask for cosigner—a man who served in the Canadian military. He was also a Band Councilor, plus he had a full time job working for the Ontario highway road construction.

He finally owned his own business when the road to the lake was maintained by the Band.



The American Dream (Part 2)

The American Dream is like trying to grab a huge ball that you can't put your arms around because you lose your grip!

In the '80s, my husband and I owned a two-flat with a double lot in a good neighborhood. Before the '80s, we heavily invested in real estate. We owned a two-flat with a coach house, and in another area another two-flat.

We were living comfortably with three sons at the time. We were able to keep up payments on a Custom Kellogg Van, plus a Ford truck for my husband. We were able to finance some long trips to our reservation, start a business, and our own three-bedroom home there near my sister and mother.

Slowly we were losing our grip. The demands of land-lording were too much, the multiple fix ups when tenants leave was too much for the investment building that it was best to sell.

Today we still have the two-flat, own one car, and a home in the reservation. The land leasing is now in the hands of our sons.

MONICA RICKERT

Wandering

I find myself constantly afraid.

I awake to find that nothing has changed.

My room remains the same, unkempt but pretending to be organized.

For so long I've hidden myself and only presented a mask to the world.

I hate myself for it.

It cost me someone very important to me and I fear I will never get him back.

But all hope is not lost. I still attempt to keep sane.

I look for ways to make myself better,

to be proud of who I am, and where I come from.

I've returned to my roots in hopes of finding

the source of my pain, my fear, my darkness.

I will come out and claim the light as my own again,

I pray it doesn't take too long.



RAVEN ROBERTS

It was always hard for me to describe my race to non-Natives. I would always get, "Where are you from?" My reply would be "Chicago." Then they would say, "No, where is your family from?" and I would say "Chicago." Then they would say, "You know what I mean." Then I would have to go into a whole history lesson. I would say, "I am Native American" and they would say, "I'm native to America too." "Indian." I hated using this term but many times I had to. Or I would make a movie reference, which doesn't always capture the realness of my people. The only way some people would understand is if I said, "Indian. You know, the feather in their hair, cowboys!" Then I would get a big gasp of, "Oooooooh, so you're from India." Then another breakdown of indigenous history began, followed by more questioning.

I am Potawatomi, Miqma and Oneida, among other tribes. Even though those are my tribes, it is still not the right term. For how can a name define a people who define themselves? CHICAGO I AM.

JUSTINE POCHEL

Watchay

My name is not important. It takes too long to be pleasant, to smile, to stop and open that door. Keep up or get left behind. You're not degreed, you have no influence in this reality... no education. You're trapped.

My name is mom. Your days are too short, you love too much, you wait and nourish, give with no need of getting, but get rewarded by every second. You are the teacher, the most influential being imaginable... you are education, your love hello.

I am Cree and Lakota. I would like to thank you all for allowing me to speak here today. I am a granddaughter, daughter, sister, aunt, and a mother. I am a piece of a whole. I define my existence and my role by the people around me, and their needs. I learn and teach, give and get gifted.

My name is not important, my actions and words are. I am an influential being, a teacher. I am First Nation, I am me...



LAKOTA REYNA

Morning Star

"I had a dream last night," I told my friend Susan, an older Syrian woman whose faith in God could be held by no bounds.

"Yes?" she replied in a form of a question. Obviously tired, she sighed and reached back and pulled forward her long ponytail. Fidgeting just a little she settled in on the metal bench beside me.

"Now what kind of dream did you have?" she asked looking at me seriously.

I had not been afraid to tell her what I had seen nor was I afraid to tell her the direction I was going, not even the place that I am.

Even if we are worlds apart.

Different cultures.

Different ages.

Different traditions.

And different ways in life. Not once did she ever make me feel that what I confided in her was made up or untrue. Nor did I have to hide my understanding of this world in the shadows. Not once did she say my way of life was wrong or unfavorable to God.

Bottom line, she was accepting.

Who is this lady, with the long red hair and freckled light skin, with a gentle demeanor and soft voice that had never been raised to a harsh word in anyone's direction? My trust in her was complete, for I knew she meant no folly.

I began my story. My Tunkashila (Grandfather), Wicapi Anpetu Morning Star came to see me. He asked me to take a walk with him. I was tired, but I was so happy to see him that it all melted away in his light.

"Where are we going?" I asked him, but he told me to be quiet and not to wake the others.

"Come," he said gently. "Come take a walk with me."

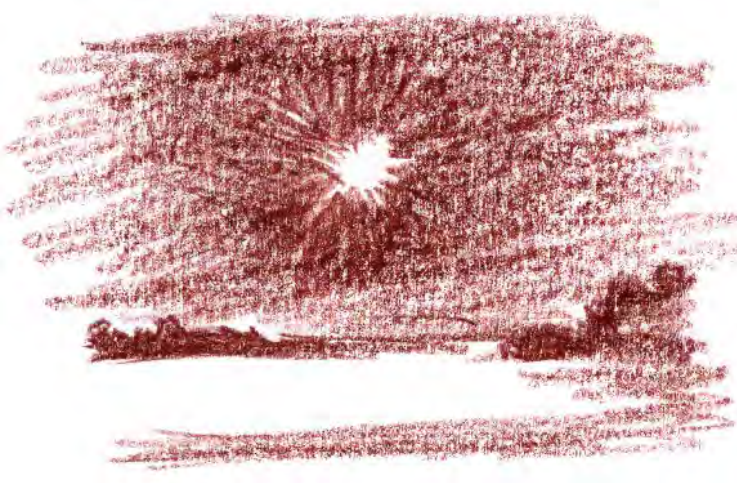
Without word I was up putting on my shoes and jacket. Eager to join him I hurried along and crept out the door. Together we walked in silence, but only for moment before he took my hand. Next thing I knew we were at the shore of the lake sitting on a big tree and facing east.

"Have you forgotten us?" he asked me softly.

"Yes and no," I replied. A dual answer that lived in my heart. The truth was that I had not made time for them, and there I felt a bit ashamed.

When I was younger I was taught a way in which we are to honor those that are one of Creator's first creations, the ancient ones. The ones of peace, love, wisdom, and guidance for they have looked upon Makoce, Mother Earth, and the heavens itself. There are many in this group, but the ones I speak of in particular are the Stars. This way was called tea with the Stars. Having tea with the Stars was done in two ways, once when Grandfather Sun rose in the east as we thanked him for the new day and we bid the Stars a good night. The second was done at the end of the day facing west to thank Grandfather for the day that has passed and welcome the Stars for another night and hopefully they had a good story to tell before making our way to our beds.

Black Elk, an Oglala medicine man, speaks about the Morning Star. He tells of his role in this world, the importance of his existence. Every day Morning Star takes his place in the east and sings his song, a welcoming song for Grandfather Sun. In this song he tells the people to rise and bid this golden one a thank you for he rises for the people. Every morning with joy in his heart and love for Creator, for Grandfather Sun, for the people he sings his song without delay, or complaint. Black Elk also speaks of his great wisdom that exists in his light. Up high just as Grandfather Sun's light warms the darken sky, you can see Morning Star clearly and with that clarity comes a great wisdom to live a good life. It's simple really. Creator made man with all the love that Creator is and in doing so he made a good way of life in which Morning Star is the teacher of that particular knowledge.



After moving to Chicago I had not had tea with my Tun-kashilas (Grandfathers) and Uncis (Grandmothers), the Wicapi Oyate (Star Nation). Not out of disrespect or laziness, it just got harder and harder with the changing of time and place. I knew in my heart that maybe I could have tried harder, because they deserved my thanks, my respect, and my time. Furthermore, I missed them much more than they missed me.

Without looking at Wicapi Anpetu I began to tell him how I felt. It had been a year now since I'd see everyone, including Wamnamni (the Whirlwind) and because of that I carried a heavy heart. Though I knew I was not truly alone because they were there as they have always been from the start. Selfishly I thought of myself and cared about the thoughts of others and that blinded me to the unseen.

"What is it you carry?" "You wouldn't understand." "Try me," he said laughing at my frivolous concerns. "I hate it when people think I'm something I'm not," referring to the latest gossip that was being passed around about me. "Therefore people think I'm a flake, a weirdo." I asked him, "Do you think I'm a flake?"

"Why do you worry about things that are not important?" he continued. What I know is you are valued or you would not be here today. You have a purpose in this life and that purpose will be called upon very soon. So be ready. You are no victim, so don't walk as if you are. What I am worried about are the dark ones who seek to make your life a heavy one. But do not worry for I will be there to help you. Come, it is time to go."

Taking my hand, we were at my home again. "Rest now and sleep well," he said before sending me back to my bed.

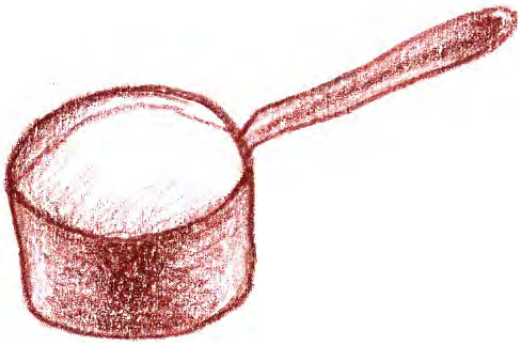
"That's the end of the dream." Without hesitation Susan said, "That was a holy spirit that came to speak to you. Someone clean." She calmly added, "You are valued and it needs to be said that God is calling upon you in His plans. Rejoice, even if you don't always understand and be at peace that he always has his reason. I may not be of your world, but I believe that there is a God and He loves you."

GEORGINA ROY

A Cup of Sugar

My neighbor would wave at me as I entered my coach house. She had her eye on me from afar. She would see us going in and out of my home. When both our blinds were open, I could see right into her kitchen. This is where she often tended to her children. I was curious about her; she was very pretty and classy. We both lived on Oakdale Street in Chicago. One day, as I was leaving from my apartment she popped open her back window and yelled out, “Can I borrow a cup of sugar?” She said her name was Jacqueline. She invited me in for a cup of coffee—and I never left. We talked for hours. I learned she had a son and a daughter ages six and eight, and was a single mom. Jacqueline was born in Southern Illinois and raised in Chicago with her two brothers and sister. We became instant friends.

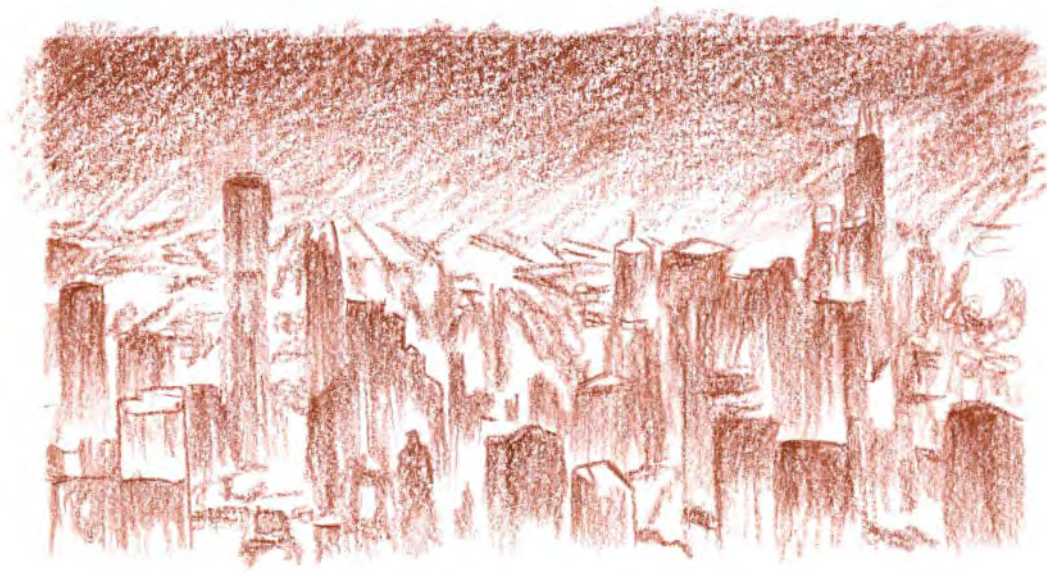
In 1974, I came straight from the reservation to the city, young and green-horned. As I think back now I dressed clown-like. Not knowing which colors complemented one another, unaware of the rules of fashion, I put together wool and chiffon. Jacqueline intervened. She helped me learn the rules of fashion and what to wear for my age. I was only 18; she said I dressed like a grandma. Thanks to her, I now receive compliments on how I dress! Also, she taught me many short cuts to speed up my cooking. I learned some recipes and Puerto Rican dishes, which I still cook today. Most of all, I learned how to get around the city.



When I became pregnant with my first child, Jacqueline shared her experiences of childbirth, but she left out a lot of details! We helped each other by babysitting. We shared so many family stories and made new chapters as the years passed. In 1985, we both moved and bought our first homes close to my sister’s neighborhood across town. Our plan was for our kids to grow up together. Our children all became good friends and attended the same school.

Luckily, I was at the right place at the right time when the city offered a great program for young mothers. I was able to apply for a foster-care license. Then I opened a home daycare center, which I called “Punkins!” I managed the business myself, and reaped the benefits for thirteen years. The biggest benefit was hiring on my best friend Jacqueline as my assistant. We played and worked all day.

Jacqueline had two more daughters we adored; we wore out many pairs of shoes going back and forth to each other’s houses. This stranger became my best friend. We were inseparable through all of life’s ups and downs. I’m glad to know her. She was my first non-Native friend. Today, our now adult children continue to write more chapters. We continue to love one another from afar and treasure our memories and pictures.



DEBRA YEPA-PAPPAN

Urban Raised

I was not born in Chicago but I was raised here, in the city. I'm a city girl to the bone. Don't ask me to go camping, because I will not. I love the city for all its diversity and culture. I am diverse. But all this is not to say I don't enjoy visiting the woods, the country, or the mountains. I love the mountains and it's the Jemez Mountains I love the most. If it weren't for the family trips to Jemez when I was a kid, I don't know if I would appreciate someplace other than Chicago.

I like to go back "home" to Jemez. Only there can I see the entire expanse of the sky, the mesas and mountains making up the horizons, the turkey vultures flying overhead, and the coyotes crying in the distance. At night, it is darker than dark and ever so quiet except for the occasional rez dog barking at something only it can see. I'm afraid of the dark; I miss my orange city lights. Only when the sky begins to lighten do I feel safe.

My daughter Ji Hae was born in Chicago. She is being raised here. She is a city girl through and through. She's more diverse than I am, made up of two parents of many cultures. She loves the city. Diversity is natural to her. But unlike me, she would go camping in a heartbeat if asked. She loves nature hikes and being out in the woods walking on wet, muddy marshy trails.

We've picked up the tradition of going to Jemez once a year. I can tell Ji Hae feels right at home when we're there. We take our drive up to the mountains, to the place where we had spread my father's ashes. We love it up there! We're at peace and feel like we're with my dad. There's hardly ever anyone else there. The air is cool and crisp, it's quiet except for the sound of the running stream and the occasional little bird squawking at us if we get too close to the tree where its nest is. We talk to the bird to reassure it that we're not there to bring it harm as we move along on our way. Ji Hae loves it here. I think she feels her grandfather's presence.

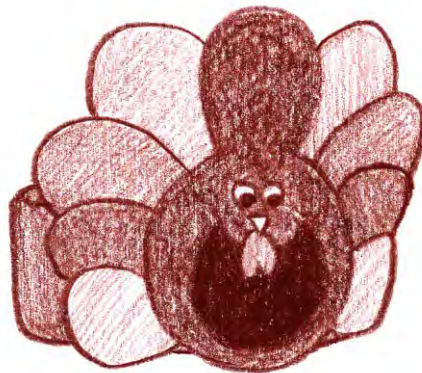
We make it back to the village before it gets dark, because like me, Ji Hae is afraid of the dark too. I think she misses her orange city lights.

JANIE POCHEL

Living in Two Worlds

Being born into two worlds and not fully understanding either of them, I always knew I was different but could never put my finger on it. I would sit in my rock garden and talk and think, “Why don’t any of my school friends, teachers, the mailman, why can’t they understand me? How come my questions never get answered? Am I speaking a different language? Is it my lisp? I swear I’m getting that fixed.”

My first glimpse of becoming conscious was when my teacher said rocks weren’t alive. I raised my hand and said, “That’s crazy.” I looked around at all my friends and classmates for reassurance and saw faces that assumed I was crazy for knowing that. Then it happened. They laughed at me. Even my teacher, this person who was supposed to teach me, still had so much to learn. So I went home, talked with my rock friends, talked with my mom, and told her how insane school was. That’s when I got the reassurance I was looking for. “They just don’t get it,” she said. But it also made me realize I should keep most of my thoughts and feelings to myself, so the world won’t look at me like I was crazy.



The next time I raised my hand in class we were “celebrating” Thanksgiving and making war bonnets. I asked my teacher, “Why don’t we all just wear our dance outfit instead of making these ridiculous construction paper feather headdresses?” Then that look came across everybody’s faces again and the room fell silent. I found out that day that everybody’s not Native, like I had thought. The stories I had heard were true. My friend looked at me and said, “You’re the only one.” It was a feeling that words haven’t been invented in the English language to express. It was like going really fast over a hill, mixed with the moment in movies when someone says they’re pregnant or something and the background drops back and dramatic music plays. That’s how it felt. “I’m the only one.” That’s how they looked at me.

My world changed that day. I realized that’s why they don’t know, because they don’t know. You have to get it to get it. My questions still go unanswered and I still get these quizzical looks when I speak, but that’s the life I lead. I wouldn’t call myself a superhero but...

LAKOTA REYNA

Liquid Gold

Coffee... What is that word? What is coffee? A drug? Maybe. All I know is I must have my coffee. Dunkin Donuts preferably, but I'll drink Starbucks if I have to.

As a child I never drank it, of course; but I loved the smell. I could never figure out why it didn't taste as good as it smelled. I was confounded as I looked about the adults in my family sitting around the table sipping on the liquid gold. Flashes of times and events pass through my mind and not one did not have coffee in it. AIM rallies... fueled by coffee. Winter camps... fueled by coffee. Sundance camps... fueled by coffee. Powwows... fueled by coffee. Coffee, coffee, coffee. I truly believe the world would lose its sanity without it.

So I ask again, is it a drug? Maybe, maybe not.



DOROTHY ROY

Capturing Christmas

The Christmas stage was set there in M'chigeeng First Nations: the snow hanging over roof tops, the hilltops covered in snow. Sometimes I wasn't sure if Santa would come to our home, because Santa was known to ride by the reservation.

Dad would tell us he hoped with all his heart Santa would stop at our house, because if the conditions were right—meaning if there was enough snow on the ground—Santa's sleigh could move easily.

The concern my dad had was whether our great auntie who worked in Toronto would send gifts to us this year. Most years my great auntie would send gifts. I now know that each year this was very stressful for my parents.

The memory of opening Christmas presents from Santa (my great auntie) was when my sister and I received two identical dresses. One was red with blue trimming and the other was blue with red trimming. They both had bib collars and three cloth-covered buttons. I remember those dresses were worn only on special occasions. On Sundays we would wear the dresses to church. After church my older cousin Susan would ask my mother, "Do you want me to

change their dresses?" I used to wish she wouldn't remember this routine. It really upset me because I still wanted to wear the dress. But Susan already had it ingrained to take care of our Sunday clothing.

I only knew many, many years later that Santa Claus was my great auntie. She knew our size and our needs because Dad had shared them in a letter.



DAWN E. BEDELL

Cultural Seeds of Persecution

Occasionally my thoughts turn to the honoring of the ancestors. Since my cultural background is a mixture of Native American, American, and African American, it is important for me to break certain conditioning factors from my life. In respect for my mother, I keep her belief in “Remember where you come from.” It is important to have growth whether it is emotionally, physically, mentally, or spiritually, hopefully it happens on all levels. Considering the common ground of all three helps to discover what change can mean.

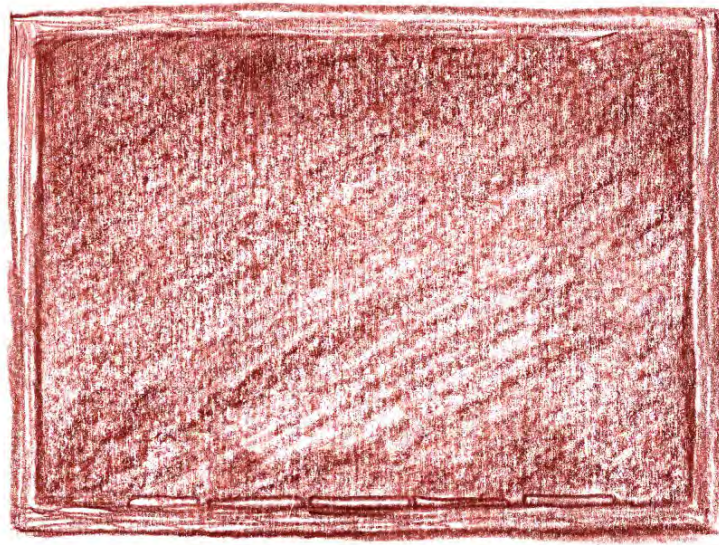
My life is a garden and I want to maintain or encourage one of beauty and life. Maintenance means taking what is already there and allowing it to bear fruit. Encouraging means allowing room for growth. My concern is the tearing down of weeds that want to inhibit or strangle the others only for selfish means. The commonality of the three could be strength, courage, determination, and just being human. They are the plants who bear good fruit.

One thing that stands out for me is I constantly look for inhibitors of growth to leave room for improvement. “Where in the world did this plant come from?” It smells, doesn’t taste very good, and isn’t beneficial. I’ll pull you out and burn you so you never come back! Natives and beautiful herbs, America the free, and African drums all have a beauty of their own. There is something that isn’t quite right. Examining closer in that garden I find parts of History. History isn’t the culprit, it is actually beautiful, although to maintain I must do a little pruning.



Settlers or whoever comes to this land of America to tell its current inhabitants of a Jew who was persecuted for our Salvation. He is a powerful one who will give us eternal life. So is that the real reason we hope in this today? All I see are Natives dying and having to recourse to the same methods used against them. Africans who struggled during slavery are recovering and surviving the best way they know how. The seed seems to be of persecution. Why would one culture show how a savior was persecuted then turn around and persecute others to get what is really wanted? What was really wanted was the freedom? I haven’t a clue but it kind of seems that a power greater than us has that answer and is probably the reason for why we hold a faith in something stronger to pull out the weeds of life.

Hopefully after all that has happened we will see the Paradise so many believe in. Until then I continue to spot trouble, some weeds like evil or persecution, and plant something beneficial for the whole garden.



RAVEN ROBERTS

Mistaken Identity

When I was a little girl in the first grade I was put in a bilingual class. I remember not understanding my teacher or the students. The teacher thought I was a mute in the beginning. Then the day came when I had to have a parent-teacher conference. My grandmother couldn't make it so my neighbor (also my babysitter) went in her place. First thing that came out of my teacher's mouth was, "She does her work but she doesn't talk or seem to listen." My babysitter laughed and said, "Because she doesn't speak Spanish. She is Native American." Then my teacher broke out into laughter. I moved to my new English speaking multi-cultural class shortly after the meeting.

This is just one incident out of many where my identity was mistaken. One time some "Mexican" elders were trying to talk to me in Spanish. I told them, "I apologize but I do not speak Spanish." Then one of the women broke out in English talking to the others saying, "Oh these kids today don't even know their language." Then I stepped in their circle and told her, "Spanish isn't my language nor is it yours. I am Native American. I speak English because my people were taken over by them, and you speak Spanish because your people were taken over by the Spaniards."

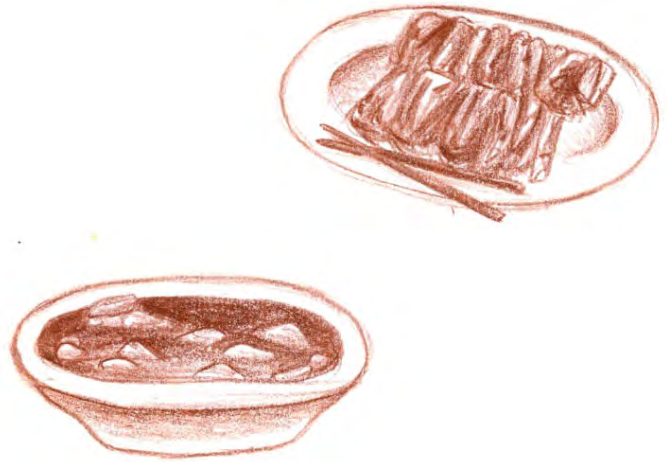
I am not Hispanic but my "cousins" are; we are all related and some closer than others. Imaginary lines in our minds and on the maps are what separate us. Hispanics think I look like them and sometimes I think they look like me, but the reflection inside is what really matters.

DEBRA YEPA-PAPPAN

Different Worlds

I've always felt like I've lived in different worlds.

There was always my world at home, when I was a kid, with my mom and dad, living in two cultures co-existing under one roof. Korean and Jemez. Eating Kimchi and rice with a bowl of red chili stew and fry bread was a normal occurrence. Taking off shoes before entering the house was a must. My dad talking in Jemez to relatives on the phone, my mom writing a letter in Korean to my grandmother still in Korea, and me absorbing it all into my memories. That was my world at home. A mixed-race world, a typical non-"American" household, at least in those times, in the '70s in Chicago.



Then there was the world away from home, where I had to pretend I wasn't so different. Not that I was ashamed or anything like that, but because I didn't want to have to explain what it was that made me so different. People were a little more intolerant. So I pretended to be assimilated, but my facial features gave me away. I never really cared. I was never really one to care so much what others thought, because I had a strong foundation. I learned the ways of the other world, learned to write and speak the other language as best I could, because honestly, it's the only language I know. Learned how the other world works, so I can function fully in it. But always keeping at heart what was real, what is still real, and that's who I am. I am Asian, I am Native, I am Korean, and I am Jemez.

That is the world I am living in!

JANIE POCHEL

My Own World



I found a place of my own atop a mountain looking across the ocean, with the sun shining just for me. It's an exaggerated story, I know, but that is how it feels to find that one place where nobody can touch you. The difficult path of climbing a fence, a vertical trek up sand. At the top of the sand dune is where I found my salvation.

Being surrounded by shells of people, ghosts, this is the zombie apocalypse and I am a survivor. Pop music, bright colors, zero accountability for your actions, hiding behind religion, I was surviving THEIR world. Racism, drugs, alcohol, disrespect to women, was how they had fun. Being trapped in this go-go materialistic, consumer world makes you question if it's real.

On top of that sand hill overlooking the lake, that's what's real. The breeze, the sun, the birds, the clouds, these things are gifts and I felt like the only one appreciating them. My own world nobody would find, simply because they would never look.

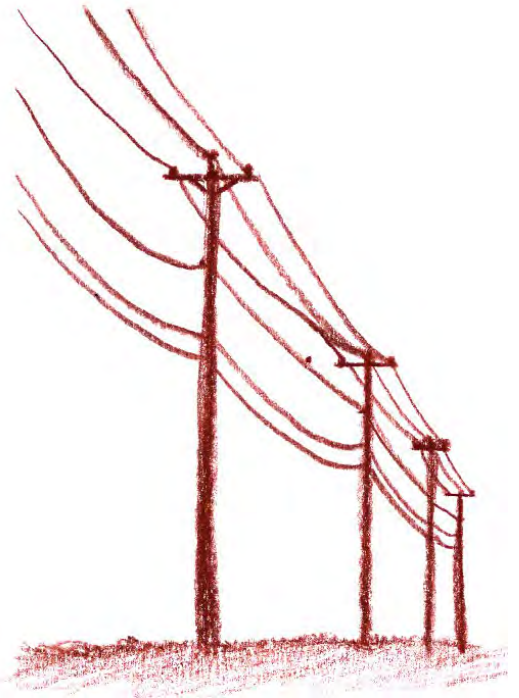
GEORGINA ROY

Powerless

On our reservation our family was the last to have hydropower in our home. This was because we needed eight huge poles to connect to the last power line reaching the main road. Our home was at the edge of the field in “No Man’s Land.” Our dad worked for the Department of Highway in Ontario, Canada. After returning from the Canadian army, he also stepped in for our chief and was a lifetime councilor and correspondent for folks that needed legal help with government papers.

This help dad with a little extra income. These hydro poles cost \$800 each. He could only afford to buy one a year. We now had four poles. We needed eight total. It was 1969. I was so embarrassed of our situation. I prayed and begged, “Dad, please! Borrow the money for the rest of the poles.” It was hard to live in a powerless home, when all my cousins and friends had power. Again in 1969, still burning coal oil, cooking on a cast iron stove, it still took so long for the food to cook. We also had no running water, and no indoor plumbing. A trip to the out-house was memorable late into the night in the deepest darkness.

Then, a miracle happened. The hydro company knocked on our door with good news: they wanted to run the hydro line right through our land. The first flick was magical. Then came the electric refrigerator, electric stove, electric radio, and our first television—black and white. Now it did not matter if we didn’t have running water or outdoor toilet. Dad even got a free gift, a brand new non-stick electric iron. So cool!



MONICA RICKERT

Passing

I am mixed and I love it. Both of my parents come from families of seven siblings. I’ve always been closer to my mother’s side of the family, though. The black side. I’m known as the light-skinned one. I share my father’s color, hair, eyebrows, but everything else is my mom. I’m the Native version of her.

My father’s family had always lived in Michigan, while my mother’s family migrated there. For a while, my mother’s aunt (who basically raised her) came to live with us when she was diagnosed with dementia. I loved her so much, and still do; she was like my grandmother. But she would slip away from us a little more every day. Once I was sitting with her at the kitchen table and she just stared at me. When I looked at her she said, “You know, if you go up North, you could pass.”

Initially I was a little offended, but I just laughed, having realized she must have thought we were back in Mississippi. It was good to know that she still considered me part of the family.

LAKOTA REYNA

Traditional in the City

Being traditional in the city is hard. Or is it? I suppose it doesn't have to be. I mean, what is being traditional?

Ritual.

Spiritual.

Ceremonial.

Beliefs.

And a way of life.

I suppose I come from a place where all of the above are mostly done in private or as my sister would sometimes chastise me, "This is between you and God." There is truth to that so I take no offense or blame her for thinking that way. I suppose I speak of my experience and knowledge because I want to share with the world the beauty of this way in life and hope that it might help people in some way.

Still, I come from a place where, no matter what, some traditions and cultural ways of life are to be kept private and not spoken of, and I have to respect that, especially living in the city.

One thing about living in the city is all the different beliefs and traditions. Aww, diversity. How refreshing. However, along with this diverse mixture comes respecting who they are, as well as respecting my own traditional values.

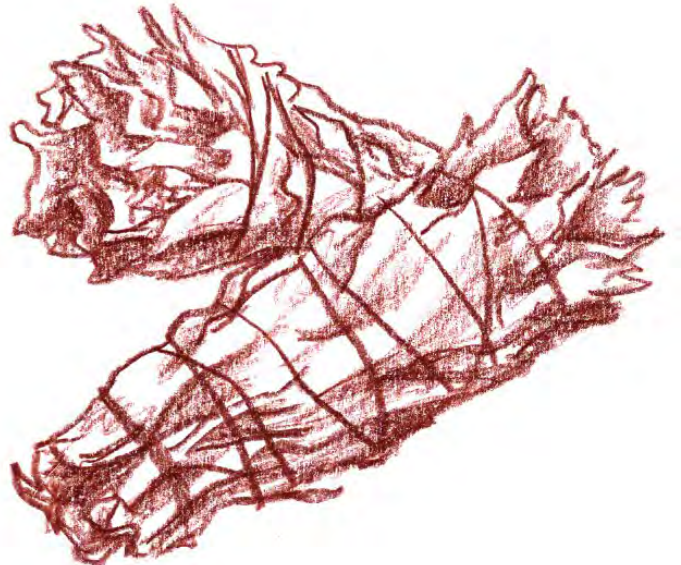
What often holds me back is the mixture of people, and what they might think of what I'm doing – whether it's smudging the outside of my building as I would the inside, or putting out a plate of food for my loved ones who walk the star road. In reality, I should not worry about the judgment of others, or let that keep me from honoring my Creator and a way of life He intended me to walk.

The second part is seriously making the time to slow down in this fast-paced world. Making time for those who watch over me, take care of me, love me unconditionally, protect me, and never ask for anything in return.

In many ways it breaks my heart to see them smiling patiently, waiting for me to sit for tea or time in prayer or simply smudging. How can I forget them? How can I forget time for my Creator?

It makes me sad and a bit ashamed. Not only that, but by not making time for this walk in life or time for honoring those who love me, it has brought my world to an unbalanced plane. Therefore, the feeling of slowly sinking into quicksand comes to mind.

Bottom line, my way is a good way, and I can never apologize for that. Thus, I must find my balance; I must honor my giver of life and the ways he taught me, whether I'm in the big city or not.





DOROTHY ROY
Wash Day

My mother, Beshni, is boiling water in huge aluminum tubs covering the whole top of the cooking wood stove. She says the wind is blowing in the right direction and it's a nice sunny day. Oh no, I complain, it's laundry day. But no amount of disappointment from me is going to stop her plans.

I dreaded laundry day. It was hard exhausting work and it was a whole day affair. The water had to be hauled in barrels from a nearby Mindemoya Lake. In the winter she melted chunks of snow. There was a tub with a washboard, another tub with bleach, and still another tub for rinsing the clothes. Each item had to be washed individually. If it was a dark work shirt it was washed on the washboard and then the rinse water. The towels were washed in the washboard and then the bleach water tub, and finally the rinsing water with each item wrung by hand to get most of the water out.

I don't know when, but one day I was inducted to laundry duty. Eventually I grew to like doing it because it was clean clothes for everybody. The clothes blowing in the wind were fun to watch. In the winter the clothes would be frozen at first and then somehow get dry.

This was life on the reservation. The outside world had washing machines. My dad did try hard, so he brought a used Wringer washing machine. My dad had to be home for my mom to wash because this machine had a gas engine. This washing machine was fired very quickly because it was too noisy and dark smoky fumes were puffing out of it. I remember this very clearly because they all wanted us upstairs but we wanted to see what was going on. After a while we stopped complaining and settled down. All of sudden my dad came running up the stairway. He looked alarmed. Sometime later I found out he thought the fumes could have killed us.

For dress clothes and men's suits I saw my mom use lighter fluid for spot cleaning. She looked alarmed when I saw her cleaning a suit like that. She explained using lighter fluid was done with caution. Now I know she wasn't that far off from what the professional cleaners were using.

How quickly I forget in my modern city life how hard it was to do laundry back then. Today I have a Kenmore washer that uses less water and is lint-free, has eight cycles and can wash blankets. It automatically determines the size of the load. The lint on your clothes was a big problem. Thanks to washing machine technology, this problem has been eliminated.

The progress of the washing machine has grown immensely. I remember having a hard time getting stains from work clothes and children's clothes. The pre-soak cycle solves that problem. I cannot forget the Dryel cycle in my dryer. This is the dry cleaning part where you can put about four garments into a bag with a Dryel cloth and thirty minutes later you have a dry cleaned outfit.



LAKOTA REYNA

If there was anything I ever want to take time out for that would be Sundance. Growing up I was afraid of Sundance. There were stories of not eating, being hungry, going up on the hill to pray alone for four days, four nights and having to deal with Geecheez (bad spirits) that try to scare you.

“No way! I’m not gonna Sundance ever!” I told myself as a child.

There were sacrifices and preparation you had to do and if you messed up that was it, you had to wait another year. That’s it, no Sundance for me, no way, no how, nada, zip, zero.

My first Sundance was up in Canada with the Cree people on the Carry the Kettle Reserve. It was a time and way of dance that is unforgettable for me. Yes, there was preparation. Yes, there was sacrifice. Yes, it was a time of suffering. No water. No food. And dancing in prayer. Just a small amount of suffering to give back for all that Creator has given to me in my life.

“I wanna dance!” I proudly tell Creator.

I wanna dance for you.

I wanna dance for me.

I wanna dance.

What is Sundance? One-on-one time with Creator. One-on-one time with me.

INSIGHTS AND STORIES FROM THE CHI-NOODIN WRITING GROUP

Acknowledgements

Kateri Center

Georgina Roy, *Director*

Title VII

Jolene Aleck, *Program Manager*

Design and Drawings by

Monica Rickert, *PR Consultant*

Community Writing Project

College of Education UIC

Janise Hurtig, *Facilitator*

Special Thanks

Ernest M. Whiteman III

Chi-Noodin Writers retain all rights to their individual stories.

Stories cannot be reprinted in whole or part without the authors' permission.



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

Printed by:

K & M Printing

Chicago Title VII American Indian Education Program
4420 North Beacon Street, Room #221
Chicago, IL 60640

www.chicagotitlevii.org