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### NATIVE DAUGHTERS

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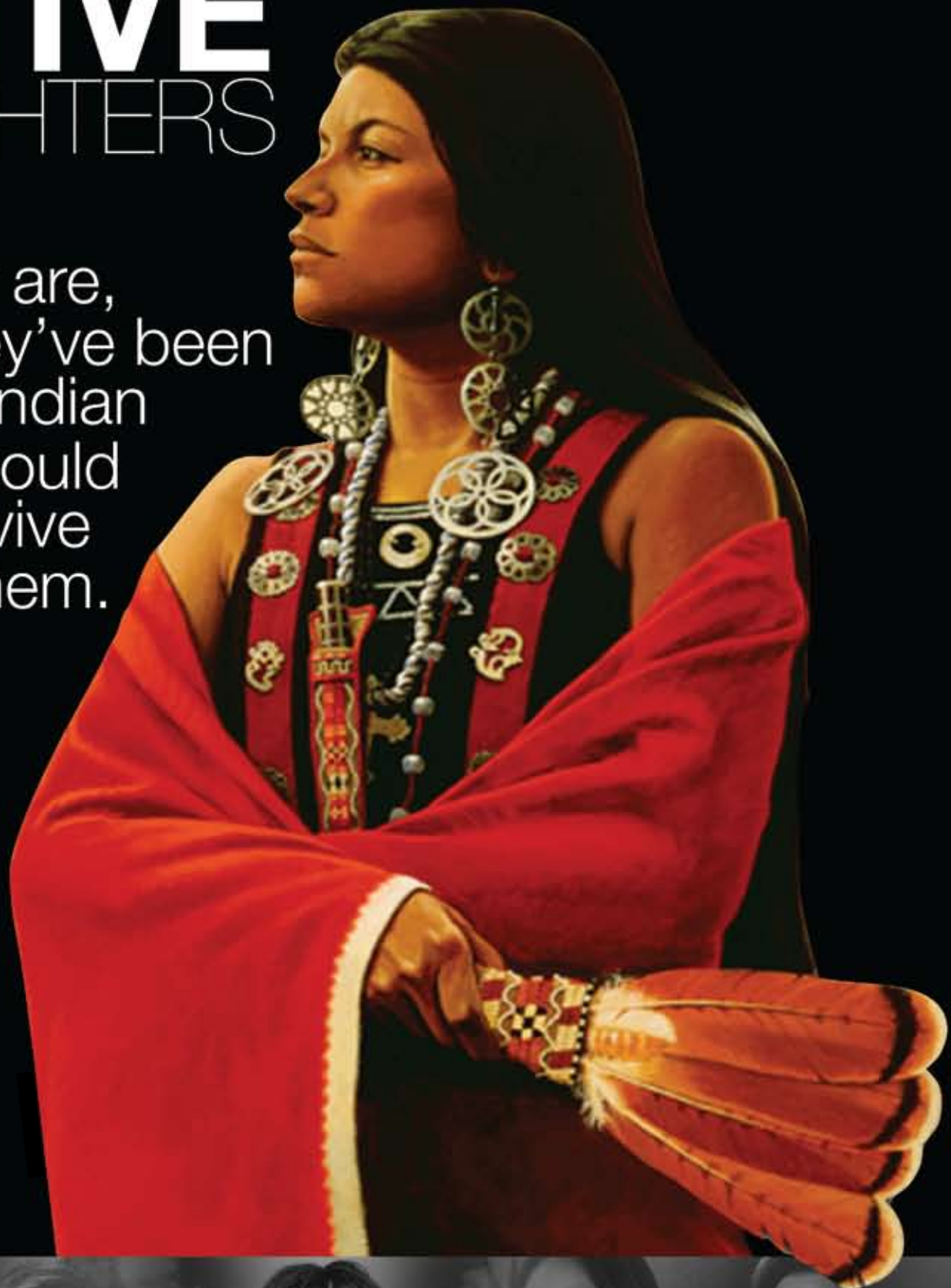
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# NATIVE DAUGHTERS

Who they are,  
where they've been  
and why Indian  
Country could  
never survive  
without them.







Imagine if you could get a major corporation to bankroll a good idea. Then imagine if you could get a Dream Team of students who would give up spring breaks and pull all-nighters to run with that idea. And imagine if you could knit together a campus-wide coalition of professors who would offer time, expertise and wisdom to help perfect that idea.

For almost two years, Nebraska's College of Journalism and Mass Communications has benefited from this perfect storm, riding a project wave dedicated to a singular idea: You can't really understand American history without understanding Native American history. And you can't understand Native American history without understanding the critical role Native women have played in defining, enriching and protecting that history.

Underwritten by a \$125,000 Carnegie Foundation grant, this journalism project is intended to substantially raise the profile of Native Daughters. To that end, the college enrolled two dozen of its best and brightest students – reporters, photographers, videographers, Web masters, copy editors and designers – in a three-semester depth reporting class that exhaustively examined the role that Native women have traditionally played in Indian history, culture, art and politics.

The students' extensive research included bringing to campus some of the nation's most



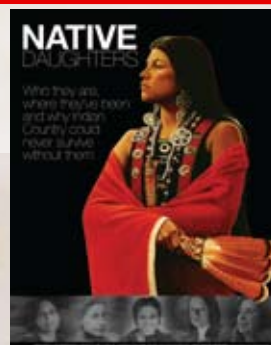
accomplished Native women, including award-winning filmmakers, Harvard-educated environmentalists, Dartmouth Medical School surgeons, prolific authors, veteran lawyers, tribal presidents and decorated Iraqi War veterans. Before it ended, the student journalists spent many hours on the Pine Ridge, Omaha, Santee

and Winnebago reservations, conducted more than 150 interviews, shot thousands of photographs and hundreds of hours of video.

Now, this rich body of work has been sculpted into a glossy, 172-page, full-color magazine, a documentary, a photo gallery and interactive Web site that will be continually updated. Ultimately, this Web site will be integrated into public school curricula throughout Nebraska, the U.S. and eventually worldwide. It will be used by teachers throughout Indian Country and beyond who want their students to see and read stories about powerful role models. Teachers who want their students to know the rich and complex contributions Native women have made to both indigenous and American cultures. Who want their students to understand the forces that gave rise to the Northern Cheyenne proverb: "A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women lie on the ground."

In the end, it is these indomitable, enduring, unconquerable Native Daughters – past, present and future – to whom this project is dedicated. ☺

**ABOUT THE COVER:** Tennessee artist H. David Wright painted "Ahnawake" as a portrait of model and friend Ahnawake Clinch. Ahnawake is a member of the Cherokee Nation, past Princess of the Native American Indian Association and lives in Nashville.





# NATIVE DAUGHTERS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS



### **LAWGIVERS** PAGE 4

The first peoples of America – men and women – knew how to govern themselves. But when settlers imposed their own laws and values, much was lost, including the health and safety of many women in Indian Country. When these new rules compromised Native women's security and self-worth, advocates began pushing back, advocates like attorney Danelle Smith of the Winnebago Tribe. *By Astrid Munn*



### **ARTISTS** PAGE 20

In a world where images and sounds constantly battle for our attention, Native women artists' pottery, painting, music and beadwork showcase their cultural heritage, history and future. Among the Native artists on the forefront of these images and sounds is Valerie Red-Horse, a Cherokee actress, director and filmmaker. *By Christina DeVries*



### **ENVIRONMENTALISTS** PAGE 40

Who better to tend to Mother Earth than Native daughters? Generation after generation, they helped maintain a healthy balance between the needs of the people and the needs of the forests, mountains and rivers. Today, that tradition is kept alive by Native daughters who want to maintain it, who are working hard to turn reservation lands into "Green Zones" – women like Winona LaDuke. *By Carson Vaughan*



### **STORYTELLERS** PAGE 58

For millennia, stories were the oral glue that held Native culture together. These stories conveyed and preserved tribal history, religious values, social customs and also were a source of wisdom and humor on long winter nights. Author Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve remembers those stories she absorbed from her elders, and now she publishes books about them. *By Shannon Smith*



### **HEALERS** PAGE 72

In their traditional cultures, Native women were entrusted with keeping their families and villages in good health. The medicine women of yesterday, the ones who knew which herbs and plants could cure colds and flu, have given way to modern Native women, including a Stanford-trained surgeon who bridged the worlds of traditional Navajo healing and contemporary Western medicine. *By Jordan Pascale*



### **WARRIORS** PAGE 86

During the Revolutionary War, an Oneida woman charged the British enemy. Today, Native women still fight for their country. And often, they're more likely to suffer sexual harassment and post traumatic stress disorder. For Oglala Lakota veteran Darla Black, serving in the military helped change her from an ashamed, pregnant teen into a fighter for herself, her family and her people. *By Katie Stearns*



### **LEADERS** PAGE 102

Though surrounded by a dominant patriarchal society, Native women are emerging as more than mothers, daughters and sisters. They are taking charge, crafting tribal policies and leading their people to a brighter future – leaders like Oglala Lakota former president Cecilia Fire Thunder, who speaks out about abuses against Native daughters that didn't exist in the distant past. *By Molly Young*



### **THE FUTURE** PAGE 118

Native teens say the reservation can be a tough place or boring place to grow up. They've been touched by tragedy among their friends and family, the people who matter much more to them than anything else in their lives, more than any other possessions. None of their frustrations, though, have stopped them from dreaming. *By Matt Buxton, Clay Lomneth, Molly Young*



# NATIVE DAUGHTERS

## UNDERSTANDING THE PAST FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

# W

hen Saadia Tasso and her teammates arrived home to the Pine Ridge Reservation in March 2009, they arrived as

champions. The Lady Thorpes had just won the South Dakota State Girls' Basketball Tournament – a feat that hadn't happened in two decades. Seventeen-year-old Saadia knew the win didn't belong to her, or even to her team. It belonged to the entire reservation, where people lined the highways and encircled its main intersection to honor the Lady Thorpes.

But Saadia's biggest victory wouldn't be a result of that championship. In fact, it wouldn't come from basketball at all. Or volleyball, golf or track – all sports she excelled in during high school. No, Saadia's greatest triumph would arrive months later.

That May, the straight-A student was slated to graduate at the top of her Pine Ridge High School class. Then enroll at the University of Oklahoma. Then apply to medical school. Then care for sick children in impoverished countries.

"Today, our Native American women, their opportunities are unlimited," said her high school principal, Victoria Sherman.

It is to girls like Saadia – to their mothers, grandmothers and ancestors – that this project is dedicated. Native American women helped create this country's history and continue to weave its current story. Someday, Saadia and others like her will help define its future.

But statistics show that it won't happen without struggle. We've all heard them. More than one in three Native women will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime, according to Amnesty International USA. In addition, Native teens face the country's lowest high school graduation rates and highest death rates, says data published by the Annie E.



Casey Foundation. Census Bureau statistics show that six of the 10 poorest counties in the nation encompass reservations in South Dakota, North Dakota and Arizona.

Yet these numbers obscure the truth. They don't tally the miles the first female president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe has traveled between reservations spreading awareness about domestic violence. They don't describe teens like the 15-year-old mother in Macy, Neb., who wants nothing more than to live with her own mother, and the 16-year-old girl in Santee, Neb., who struggles to comprehend why she has witnessed so much death.

Their stories don't fit the dominant society's comfortable images of Native women. And stories have no voice without someone to listen. Without someone to record them. Without someone to care and tell the world why they should care, too.

*aya Molly Young weenswiaani niila myaamia.*

Hello, my name is Molly Young. I am Myaamia – a member of the Miami Nation of Oklahoma. I am a Native daughter. During the past 18 months, I've been an outsider and an insider. I've danced between objectivity and admiration. I've carried two responsibilities: those of a journalist and those of a Native American daughter. Still my purpose has always remained the same: to tell stories that must be told.

When I met Saadia Tasso in her computer education classroom at Pine Ridge High School, I immediately knew hers was one of those stories. Here's a girl surrounded by some of the poorest living conditions in the U.S., attending a school where many students live in dorms rather than at home, and she's not tolerating any of it. The drugs. The alcohol. The unemployment. None of it.

Saadia has better things to do. In May





**SAADIA TAASO**, center, drives to the bucket as White River's Chelse Ludvik (5) and Marisa Medicine Bear (43) defend during a basketball game on Thursday, Dec. 18, 2008. Taaso and the rest of the Pine Ridge High School Lady Thorpes won the state title the next spring by beating previously undefeated Dell Rapids 63-57. *Photo by Ryan Soderlin, Rapid City Journal.*

2010, that meant taking the final tests at the end of her freshman year at the University of Oklahoma. She met lifelong friends, took classes with hundreds of students and shadowed a physical therapist. Now, Saadia wants to be one, too. Her script may have changed, but her determination hasn't.

Wilma Mankiller had guts, too. In 1985, Mankiller became the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, the country's second largest tribe. She served in the tribe's top post for 10 years. But Mankiller's reach extended beyond her own tribe and beyond Oklahoma. In many ways, her example started a national movement toward female tribal leadership.

After her presidency, Mankiller remained an advocate for Native women until her death in April 2010. But her voice remains strong.

"Leadership in our community is not for the faint-hearted," Mankiller said in 2005, during the inauguration of Cecelia Fire Thunder, the first female president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. "It's not for anyone who always wants people to like them. Leadership is for those willing to stay focused and stay strong."

This project is a collection of stories like hers, and stories completely unlike hers. Stories about pain and triumph and grief and hope. Stories that shatter society's comfortable images of Native American women. ☺







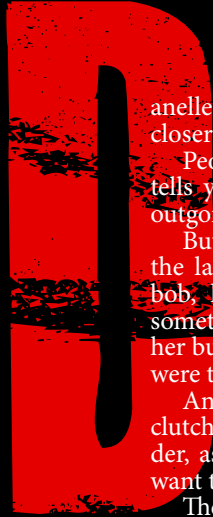
# RESCUING THE REZ

**Danelle Smith** met everyone's expectations when she left the reservation to earn her law degree. But she exceeded those expectations when she came back.

You're in a hotel conference room. It's full of lawyers, and it's time to schmooze.

About Ferguson making partner and problems with the Jaguar and god this coffee and low-grade amphetamines and LOL those were the days and oh, hey, let me give you my card. This is my card. Take my card, a crunching handshake. Another card, another crunching handshake.

STORY BY **ASTRID MUNN**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**



Danelle Smith, 37, is hanging back, staying closer to the coat rack.

People probably say she's stuck up, she tells you later. She wishes she were more outgoing.

But there's something refreshing about the lanky woman with the sleek chestnut bob, little makeup and the slightest lilt, something about the way she passes out her business card only after you ask. As if it were the last business card in the world.

And you remember how tightly she clutched the aubergine purse on her shoulder, as if she might bolt, or fly, and didn't want to lose her keys in the process.

The grip speaks of some inquietude, you want to say. Because Danelle Smith is a restless woman. Besides making junior partner

**"DANELLE BREAKS THAT OLD WAY OF THINKING BY TAKING THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS AND USING IT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE."**

— CONLY SCHULTE  
LITIGATION ATTORNEY,  
FREDERICKS PEEBLES & MORGAN

at the Omaha law firm of Fredericks Peebles & Morgan in 2009 – three years after joining – the Iowa Law alumna also provides legal counsel for her people, the Winnebago of Nebraska, teaches the occasional business class at Little Priest Tribal College and represents Native interests on the Thurston County Board of Supervisors.

Oh, and about the law school part – she did it as a single mom raising three young sons on an achingly calibrated budget of loans, child support and food stamps.

"Danelle is really making a name for herself nationally in tribal economic development," said Lance Morgan, the Morgan in Fredericks Peebles & Morgan. A Harvard Law alum and Warren Buffett in-law, the Winnebago lawyer and investor oversees her work.

Lately, her work consists of helping tribes start casinos by writing their corporate regulations and negotiating gaming terms with states.

And that's literally groundbreaking.

"Tribes historically have no real economy to speak of because they don't own their land," said Conly Schulte, a senior litigation attorney at the firm.

"Danelle breaks that old way of thinking by taking the unique aspects of tribal governments and using it to their advantage. It's one of the more modern approaches to advising tribes that I have seen."

But long before she was Danelle Smith, attorney at law, or Danelle Smith, county supervisor, or Danelle Smith, tribal negotiator, she was a 19-year-old half-breed on the rez, pregnant and freaking out.

She thought it should have been a big deal, but it wasn't, she says. People just told her: "You can apply for welfare; you can get subsidized housing."

But she just thought: "This can't be my life."

This couldn't be her life because she was Danelle Smith, child prodigy.

The saucer-eyed nerd who skipped grades and penned stories and snubbed basketball and yes, may have biffed her first try at college. But, hey, she was supposed to be a lawyer – not a welfare mom.

So five months pregnant, she enrolled in tribal college and got a job as a payroll clerk, knocking down \$7.25 an hour.

"Whatever I needed to do to become a lawyer."

After all, that was the plan since age 12 – when she first stepped off the reservation and realized two things:

1. Everyone thinks I live in a tipi.
2. I'm Indian, and I've been screwed over.

Her people were swindled, she tells you, because they didn't understand the American legal system. Hence land grabs and poverty. So, refusing the world as it was handed to her, she set upon learning the system. For herself, her child, her people.

**A long road to success**

Danelle Jeanine Smith was born Jan. 25, 1972, to a sickly Winnebago teenager and a white father, whom she once spotted at a football game when she was 11. Her mother, battling alcoholism and depression, gave Danelle up for adoption.

Gus and Victoria Smith, a Winnebago couple in their 50s with grown children, welcomed the baby girl into their modest home.



Danelle Smith as a toddler standing outside with Gus, her adoptive father in January 1974.

**1974**



**1975**

Danelle Smith (right) and her friend in preschool showing off their Head Start certificates.

**DANELLE**  
THROUGH THE YEARS

A brief history of how Danelle became the woman she is today. *Courtesy of Danelle Smith.*  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ





**DANELLE SMITH** works at her office in Omaha, Neb. Smith became a junior partner at Fredericks Peebles & Morgan within three years at the firm. When she enrolled in tribal college at age 19, she said she would do "Whatever I needed to do to become a lawyer." *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*



Danelle Smith standing outside her tribal college graduation ceremony. She graduated from Winnebago's Little Priest College in 1994 with an associate's degree.

1994



1997

Danelle Smith holding her youngest son, Chayse.



Danelle Smith proudly displays her law school diploma from the University of Iowa.

2003

# “A LOT OF LAWYERS ARE AGGRESSIVE. BUT SHE HAS A Demeanor THAT’S REALLY AMENABLE TO GETTING PEOPLE TO LISTEN AND TALK WITH EACH OTHER.”

— LANCE MORGAN  
FREDRICKS PEEBLES & MORGAN

Danelle knew her birth mother, though. She remembers seeing her on the street, and she could tell, growing up, that she was a drunk. She tells you this over the phone, calling from Palm Springs. Business.

Meanwhile, her new dad tinkered with cars to make ends meet, and he and his wife gave Danelle a fairly normal childhood. While some Native children dealt with alcoholism and violence at home, Danelle remembers a doting mom making breakfast every morning and asking how school went every afternoon.

Ah, school.

“Once, she made an entire multiplication table. We were in the third grade,” says Brian Chamberlain, a childhood friend and present-day colleague on the Winnebago Tribal Council, on which he is treasurer. “She stayed inside to work on it while we were at recess.”

This was in the 1980s. The B.C. Era – Before Casino. Winnebago was a poor reservation, and its schools didn’t have gifted programs for students like Danelle. So she skipped the fifth grade – the school’s solution for precocity.

“It was hard for her to be so smart,” recalls Nancy Martin, Danelle’s unofficial big sister. “Mom decided to get [Danelle] out of public school so she could get a good education.”

So Danelle spent her teen years at Flandreau Indian School, a boarding school in South Dakota.

Though it wasn’t necessarily rigorous, Flandreau was a better fit. She got to meet kids from Minnesota, Montana and places that weren’t Winnebago.

But it wasn’t the best for college prep.

In 1989, she took a bus to Fort Lewis College in Colorado. She stayed two months. Though bright, she had poor study skills. Moreover, her adoptive mother had pancreatic cancer.

She stayed home. Her mother went through chemotherapy and died the following March.

Eighteen and a bit adrift, Danelle sank into the living rooms, the meadows and the woody riverbanks where her peers liked to have a good time. And for a little while, the fizz of wine coolers and the howls of party talk muffled those law school dreams.

Pregnancy yanked her back to reality.

She had this baby she was fully responsible for, she says. But it kept her focused.

She describes the ’90s in a single breath: An associate’s degree from Winnebago’s Little Priest College in 1994, then marriage and two more children, part-time studies at Wayne State, followed by a bachelor’s in business administration in 1998, then divorce, the LSAT and moving with three boys – ages 3, 6 and 9 – to Iowa City for law school and some internships in between.

At Wayne, she says, her typical day was dropping off her kids at day care, working a half-day and then going to class at night.

And in law school, most of her classmates didn’t have to work. They were going to the bar, she was picking up her kids.

The stress of family and work put a dent in her grades but what mattered was getting the law degree and bringing it back to Winnebago, which she did in 2003 with a general counsel position at Ho-Chunk, Inc., the tribe’s economic development corporation.

“She could be a highfalutin’ lawyer in California or New York, but she chose to raise her family here,” Martin said. “She’s one of the few people who got out and got an education and came back to the tribe.”

She rejects the status quo of Indian poverty, attorney Morgan says. And she rejects it so sweetly.

“A lot of lawyers are aggressive,” Morgan said. “But she has a demeanor that’s really amenable to getting people to listen and talk with each other.”

## Looking toward the future

If her story were a rhapsody, you would expect the momentous finale here. But Danelle’s career is young, and she has a slight case of “Now what?”

Sometimes, she takes her Honda Civic for a little spin around the rez. She rolls past the older houses and recalls who lived there. She eyes the new houses and measures the change. Then she passes a construction site. It’s Ho-Chunk Village, a tightly spaced development that will get residents walking and biking amid homes and shops.

Twelve-year-old Danelle, with her juris doctorate dreams, would be pleased. She became a lawyer, and she learned the system. Every day, she rights historical wrongs – the land grabs, the poverty – for her people, for other Indian nations.

On drives like this, the schmoozing and handshakes and Palm Springs can wait.

It’s good to be home. ⊕



## Q&A

### BIOGRAPHY DANELLE SMITH

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#### What keeps you up at night?

Being a mother.

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#### What’s your biggest fear?

Failure. But, it’s a great motivator.

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#### What’s your biggest regret?

That I didn’t get to know my parents better.

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#### What motto do you live by?

Make it happen.

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**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



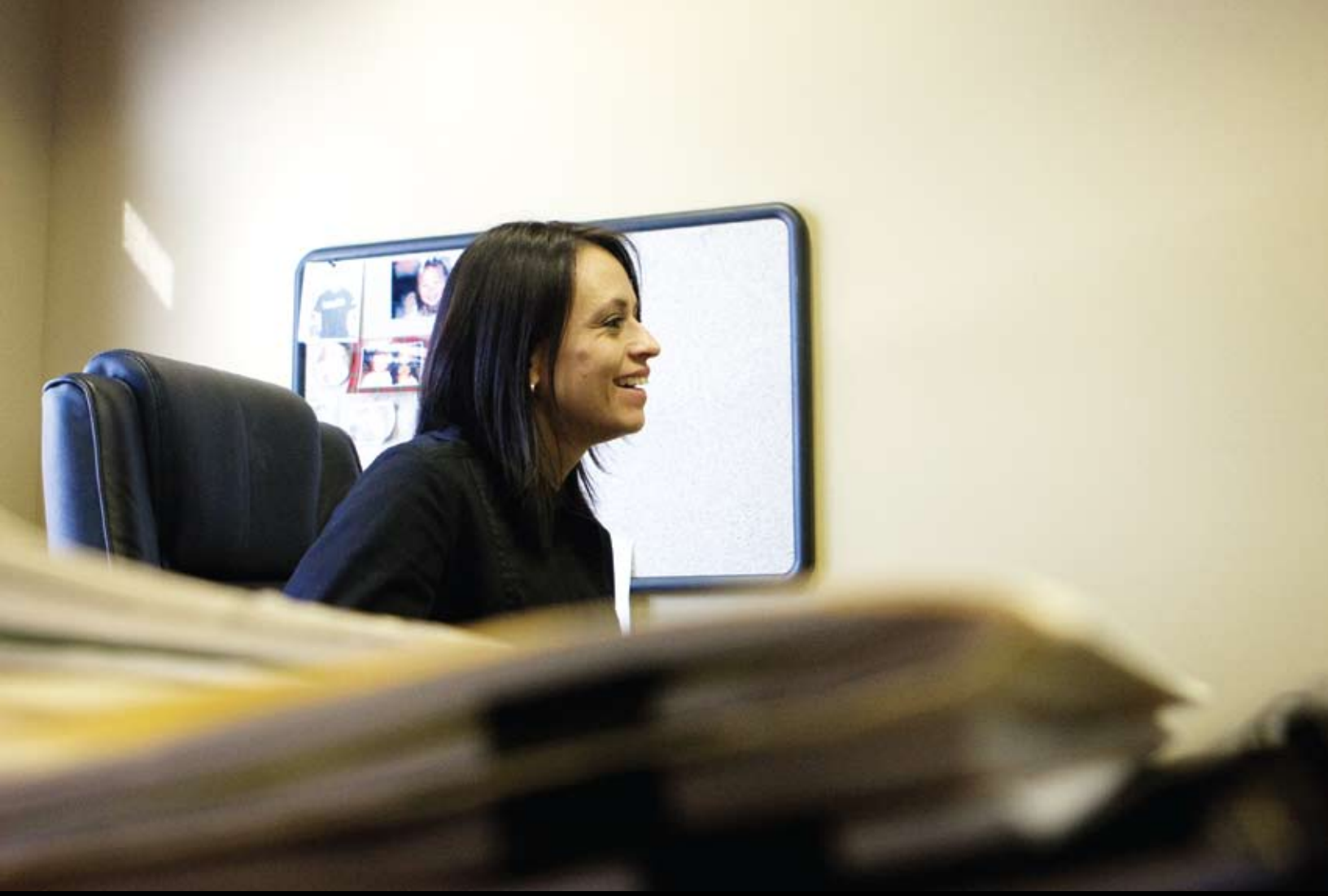
Danelle Smith describes the problems of geographical jurisdiction on the reservations.



It would have been easy for Danelle Smith to just stop going to school, like many before her.



Links to more stories about lawgivers issues on reservations.



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**DANELLE SMITH**

(above) works in her office at Fredericks Peebles & Morgan in Omaha, Neb. As a teenager, Danelle attended Flandreau Indian School, a boarding school in South Dakota.

**MATTHEW**

(left), Danelle's grandson, is displayed on her bulletin board at work. He turned 1 year old in March 2010.  
*Photos by Clay Lomneth.*





# STAKING THEIR CLAIM

Plagued for years by violent crimes and apathetic law enforcement, Native women are finally gaining a foothold in the struggle to re-establish their rights.

She needs to call 911. She needs the police to arrest the drunken boyfriend who assaulted her. She needs to go to the hospital, because she might be pregnant, and he might be HIV-positive. She needs a thorough exam – and she needs to speak with a lawyer.

STORY BY **ASTRID MUNN**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**

## “IT DOESN’T MATTER WHETHER YOU COME FROM OR WORK IN AN URBAN AREA OR A RESERVATION. THIS LAND IS OUR LAND.”

— CHARON ASETOYER  
COMANCHE WOMEN’S  
ADVOCATE

On some Indian reservations, where alcoholism and domestic violence are rampant, this scenario is commonplace. Amnesty International reported in 2007 that Native women are 2 ½ times more likely to be sexually assaulted than American women in general.

But when a Native woman dials 911, a series of obstacles often arise. Many of these obstacles stem from laws governing tribes, and they can amplify the horror of sexual assault on Native reservations.

Among these legal obstacles is a by-law from the Code of Federal Regulations that dates to the 1950s.

The bylaw’s original intent was to let agencies, such as Indian Health Services, the main health care provider on reservations, shield their information from state prosecutors during court proceedings. The perceived benefit: less involvement keeps agencies neutral. But some critics say IHS relies on the law to withhold information from both state and federal prosecutors altogether, including forensic evidence that could incriminate a rapist. The gain here is unclear.

“So we have serial rapists that stalk our women,” said Charon Asetoyer, whose South Dakota-based organization fights for Native women’s reproductive rights. “Basically, what is happening is our Native women are not getting equal protection under the law, and that is a violation of our constitutional rights.”

Asetoyer, who is Comanche, and other advocates like her want more legal protection because Native womanhood was not always so rife with violence.

For centuries, Native American tribes revered their mothers and daughters, and Native women often enjoyed the same autonomy as men. Some women were even shamans or councilwomen. Historians say these women could declare war, regulate trade and negotiate with enemy tribes.

Over time, however, European settlers introduced misogynistic attitudes often veiled in religious teachings – the diaries of early missionaries reveal how some encouraged Native men to rein in their wives and demand subservience.

“I told him then that he was the master,” wrote Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary who worked with the Montagnais-Naskapi people in 17th-century Canada. “And that in France, women

do not rule their husbands.”

Some modern Native leaders say those teachings – in conjunction with forced removals, allotments and boarding schools – gradually debased women’s status in Native society. Although tribes were given land to call their own, some judges and lawyers say many Native nations now lack the authority to prosecute crimes, leaving them vulnerable when it comes to protecting their own communities.

“Therein lies the problem of domestic violence,” said Karen Artichoker, the former director of a Pine Ridge Indian Reservation shelter that counsels abusive men and houses battered women. “It is the influence of a Western society that has strategically changed the way we live.”

Today, however, Native women increasingly are confronting these historical injustices and helping to significantly improve:

- A tribe’s ability to enforce tribal and criminal laws
- The policies protecting victims of domestic violence
- Sovereignty over tribal artifacts and culture

Each year, it is these women – in education, entertainment, health and law – who are channeling their historical role as Native lawgivers to help restore women’s sacredness throughout Indian Country.

“If I’m oppressed in San Jose or Washington, D.C., or San Francisco, I am going to stand up for my rights,” Asetoyer said. “It doesn’t matter whether you come from or work in an urban area or a reservation. This land is our land.”

### A history of power struggle

It is the stuff of grade school textbooks: Iroquois Nation women had a great deal of power before settlers arrived. These Native women owned land, controlled village commodities and, most famously, elected men to represent them in national councils.

These facts are usually mentioned in passing, somewhere between Columbus reaching the New World and Squanto helping the Pilgrims. Less known, however, is the negative effect land grabs had on women’s lawgiving powers.

Among the best-documented de-



clines in power was that of Cherokee women.

Through the late 1700s, Cherokee women were civically engaged. They owned land and had a say during wartime. But this changed after the tribe ceded large tracts of land to the U.S. government in 1795.

The Cherokee, wanting to hold onto land still in their name, assimilated into Southern farming culture. To fit in, the men needed to play landowner, so inheritance patterns switched.

“The Cherokee always knew it was the women’s land,” said Donovin Sprague, a professor of American Indian studies at Black Hills State University. “But it was





**NATIVE ATTORNEYS** (left to right) Jennifer Bear Eagle, Andrea Miller, Danelle Smith and Leonica Charging share a laugh with monitor Judi gaishkibos (far right) at a lawgivers panel at the University of Nebraska College of Law on April 8, 2009. Panelists described what it is like to work with tribal law, a field that many states do not incorporate into their bar exams, making the field somewhat obscure.

**LISA DRUM** (previous page) participates in a walk against domestic violence in Walthill, Neb., on Oct. 19, 2009. Photos by Clay Lomneth.

**“THE INDIAN REORGANIZATION ACT DESTROYED THIS TRADITION, THIS ROLE OF WOMEN AS LAWGIVERS.”**

– DONOVIN SPRAGUE  
PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES,  
BLACK HILLS STATE UNIVERSITY

# “BEFORE CANGLESKA, WOMEN ON THE PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION WERE GOING TO JAIL SEEKING SHELTER FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.”

— KAREN ARTICHOKER  
OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE

government policy that changed all that.”

So when President Andrew Jackson’s administration drew up the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, only men signed the treaty, which relinquished the tribe’s remaining territory in the Southeast and laid the groundwork for the Trail of Tears – a forced march to Oklahoma in which more than 4,000 Cherokee died of starvation and exposure.

Once on the reservations of the Great Plains, it seemed as though Cherokee women’s longstanding voice in policy had come to a decrescendo. Almost a century later, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 all but silenced it, encouraging tribes to draft written constitutions and elect chairmen.

“The Indian Reorganization Act destroyed this

tradition, this role of women as lawgivers,” said Sprague, a Miniconjou Lakota. “Even though men were seen as the lawgiver, they were displaced in alcohol and had lost purpose in life.”

Frozen out of politics, Native women turned to the arts. And it was through quilting circles that they organized themselves, sometimes more effectively than their male representatives, Sprague said.

Following the civil rights and women’s liberation movements, Native women returned to the higher rungs of tribal politics in the mid-1980s. But when they came back, they found a legal system ensnared in limits on what a tribe can and cannot do.

## Government takeover

Environmentalist Winona LaDuke believes tribes are not poor because they are stupid: They are poor because their resources were taken away.

Similar logic helps explain why tribes often struggle with law enforcement. Tribes know how to police their lands, LaDuke said, because “tribes managed that for thousands of years.”

But specific laws and court rulings have diminished Indian Country’s power to arrest and prosecute criminals. And some in tribal law enforcement say this contributes to higher crime rates and an overall sense of lawlessness.

Anita Fineday, tribal court chief for the White Earth Indian Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, deals with these kinds of issues every day.

She said the reservation has an annual budget of \$1 million for law enforcement. With 9,200 residents to protect, that amounts to about \$109 per person. For comparison, the nearby town of Detroit Lakes, population 8,030, devoted \$1.3 million to police in 2008, or \$157 per person.

Why the tribe does not receive additional funding is paradoxical. Fineday, an Ojibwe, said the federal government would award more if White Earth had criminal jurisdiction over its lands. But a federal law, Public Law 280, took away that authority and handed it to the state in 1953. Minnesota is one of only six states where Public Law 280 applies, but the law affects 51 percent of tribes in the contiguous U.S. and most Alaska Natives.

“It’s a great hindrance to tribal judicial programs,” Fineday said, because it blurs the line between state and tribal responsibilities.

Moreover, the added duty of protecting tribes can strain the manpower and budgets of state and federal authorities, and Native cases can get short



## TRAIL OF TEARS

painting “We the People III” by Cherokee artist Ron Mitchell.



shrift.

“There’s often not enough resources at the attorney general’s office to pursue (Native) criminal cases,” summed up Jennifer Bear Eagle, a Lakota attorney at Fredericks Peebles & Morgan, an Omaha law firm specializing in tribal law.

A U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* 1978, was another blow to tribal police. It ruled that tribal courts do not have criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians, even if an offense occurs on tribal lands, a ruling that holds today.

Oliphant left many tribes at a loss in terms of policing reservations, some legal experts note, and it put women at greater risk of being abused without consequence.

“It’s a huge problem in tribal com-

munities, where in domestic violence situations the perpetrator is non-Indian,” Bear Eagle said. “The federal government is supposed to step in at that point.” But that often does not happen, she said, because the government is strapped for resources.

### Living without fear

When a Native woman leaves a violent situation, she might run out of the house with nothing but the clothes on her back.

“That’s a very scary situation,” said Asetoyer, the South Dakota advocate for Native women’s health.

Community-based groups, however, can connect victims with shelter, health care and legal aid. And two shelters on

South Dakota reservations try to bridge the gaps that can impede Native women’s access to justice.

In 1985, Asetoyer founded her non-profit Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Center. It continues to provide shelter for abuse victims on the Yankton Sioux Reservation.

Another group, Cangleska, helps Oglala Lakota men and women break free from abusive relationships. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided start-up funds, and today, state and federal monies keep the shelter’s doors open for the 800-plus women and children seeking protection yearly.

“Before Cangleska, women on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation were going to jail seeking shelter from domestic violence,” said Karen Artichoker, the shelter’s former director and an



**CHEROKEE WOMEN** quilt in circles in this 1890 image. *Photo by Kathleen Faux, Western History Collection, Oklahoma University.*





**A WALK AGAINST** domestic violence took place in Walthill, Neb., on Oct. 19, 2009. About 20 people showed up to walk around the town carrying candles. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*

enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. “They were hiding in the fields. But then the elders said something had to be done.”

And something was. Cangleska – Lakota for “sacred circle” – pushed for a mandatory arrest law, which became part of the tribe’s penal code in 1995.

Before the law existed, shelter coordinator Norma Rendon said, women were less willing to report abuse.

“The police would look at the woman, bloody and beat, and ask, ‘Are you OK?’” Rendon said. “And she would say, ‘Oh, I’m fine,’” because she did not want to further aggravate her partner.

The mandatory arrest law, however, holds that if an officer believes an assault occurred or could happen, that alone is probable cause for arrest. Artichoker said the law provides some relief

from Oliphant because it applies Indians and non-Indians alike.

“(The law) has had a great impact,” Rendon said. “Women are a lot safer, they aren’t afraid to call the police.”

And Asetoyer, whose activism dates to the 1960s with the takeover of Alcatraz, is not afraid to call out IHS over questionable practices.

For example, in 2005, her group reported that not all IHS emergency rooms provided rape kits, or forensic exams, for sexual assault victims. Four years later, the 2009 Congressional omnibus bill dedicated \$7.5 million to sexual assault training for IHS hospitals.

Considering that IHS operates 31 hospitals nationwide, \$7.5 million is not much, Asetoyer points out. But it is a start.

Now, the non-profit is working on





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# TRUTH IN NUMBERS

SEXUAL ASSAULT  
AMONG AMERICAN  
INDIANS AND  
ALASKA NATIVES (AIAN)

AIAN women are more than **2.5** times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the U.S. in general.

**34.1%** of AIAN women, or more than **1 in 3**, will be raped in their lifetimes. For the USA as a whole it's less than **1 in 5**.

**25%** of reports of sexual violence against AIAN the alleged perpetrator is an intimate partner.

In at least **86%** of reported cases of rape or sexual assault against AIAN women, survivors report that the perpetrators are non-Native men.

**50%** of AIAN women reported that they suffered physical injuries in addition to the rape.

SOURCE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ



# “WHEN SOME PEOPLE THINK OF NATIVE AMERICANS, SOME OF THEM DO THINK OF A CARTOON.”

– KATE QUINN

LAW STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

the next step: getting test results into court. It is one thing to supply forensic exams, Asetoyer said. But to convict a perpetrator, a doctor or nurse needs to present evidence in court. One IHS law can stall their testimony, and the resource center wants to change this.

“Why are our health providers exempt from providing evidence that would convict a rapist?” Asetoyer said. “(IHS is) protecting sexual predators by not allowing their examiners to provide evidence in court.”

Thomas Sweeney, director of public affairs for IHS, said the agency could not respond to Asetoyer’s accusations on account of pending legislation that would make IHS testimony more likely.

## Native mascots

The San Francisco Peaks are sacred to the Navajo and Hopi. Their people collect herbs there and consider the peaks essential to their religious practices.

But such traditions have not stopped Arizona Snowbowl from expanding its ski resort, which uses the range’s peaks. And they did not stop a circuit court from siding with the resort.

In August 2009, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decided the resort could use Flagstaff’s wastewater to make artificial snow. Although the wastewater would be treated, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley likens the practice to flushing a Koran or a Bible down a toilet. Other critics, such as Rebecca Tsosie, agree that spraying wastewater on the peaks would desecrate a hallowed space.

“The Snowbowl case is a bad precedent within the Ninth Circuit,” said Tsosie, a law professor at Arizona State University. It is bad, she said, because it reinforces the ongoing notion that preserving sacred sites is unimportant.

Tsosie, who is of Yaqui descent, is following the resort’s 30-year saga. She attributes this ongoing problem, in part, to a rift between American values and policies.

“The United States, as a democracy, is a pluralism. They all come to the U.S. and they are all equal citizens,” she said. “But this isn’t guiding our decision-making.”

What can result from this rift is cultural appropriation – or cultural lampoonery. Think Big

Chief tablets, Land O’Lakes butter maidens and toothy warrior mascots.

For 25 years, Suzan Shown Harjo, a poet and writer, has taken on the cartoonish depictions of Native Americans, as well as the misuse of cultural terms and symbols, such as the Cherokee in “Jeep Cherokee” or the Zia Pueblo sun symbol in the New Mexico state flag.

“Cultural appropriation is a modernization of land grabs,” said Harjo, who is Muscogee and Cheyenne. “The people whose ancestors stole our resources are now taking the things that remain ours.”

She has gone so far as to sue the Patent and Trademark Office for approving the Washington Redskins logo, and her 17-year-old case awaits a Supreme Court ruling. Her case is part of a larger effort dating to the 1970s, beginning with the elimination of Little Red, the University of Oklahoma’s unofficial Indian mascot.

“(Mascots are) one of the last places people can be racist in public,” she said. “In part, Native references in sports is identity theft.”

It is theft, Harjo said, because the preponderance of caricatures has left some Native Americans unsure of who they are.

“There were a lot of ways that Native people were colonized,” she said. “And it became the identity of some Native people. That’s just sad. They identify with a cartoon.”

Kate Quinn, a first-year law student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, agrees that cartoonish depictions have warped some people’s ideas about Native Americans.

“When people think of Native Americans, some of them do think of a cartoon,” said Quinn, who is of Sisseton Wapeton Dakota descent. “It rarely crosses some people’s minds that there are Native Americans in law school or in the workplace. Or they think, ‘If I see one, I will know right away’ by the feathers in their hair or their beaded moccasins.”

Meanwhile, though much work remains, Harjo’s activism has made a difference. In 1970, when Little Red was scratched from Oklahoma’s sidelines, more than 3,000 teams used Indian mascots. About 900 mascots remain today.

“At some point, you look back and say, ‘It only took that long to get rid of two-thirds of them,’ Harjo said. “They’re going to be gone in 30 years and will go by the way of the lawn jockeys.”

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Karen Artichoker talks about World War II bringing more knowledge about worldly things to Lakota Nation.



Winona LaDuke discusses Lakota teachings that say that the creator’s law is the highest law.



Links to more stories about lawgivers issues on reservations.

# EMERGENCY SITUATION

Overlapping jurisdictions and tribal issues cause disorganized, delayed responses to 911 calls.

STORY BY **ASTRID MUNN**

**S**end someone to Winnebago, to the Dollar General. The garbage bin is on fire! The cashier smelled smoke, so she dialed 911. Then she cleared the discount store and waited for help to arrive on the Winnebago Indian Reservation on a summer day in 2006. But 15 minutes later, it sank in that help was not on the way.

“The Dollar General was on fire, and fire trucks never came,” recalled attorney Danelle Smith, a Winnebago who provides legal counsel for the tribe.

The next step was to call tribal police, but the clerk didn’t know the number. So she looked it up and then dialed, the garbage still burning.

Eventually, Winnebago firefighters doused the flames. They traced the delay to the 911 operator, who claimed no one reported a fire.

Attorney Smith ran for the county board that fall after hearing this and similar stories. For example, in the early 1990s, a Native woman called 911 in a domestic violence incident, and an operator told her to call Omaha tribal police instead.

“And when tribal police arrived, they found the boyfriend was non-Indian, so they couldn’t even arrest him,” Smith said.

Once in office, Smith investigated why some tribal residents saw delays when they called 911.

As it turned out, 911 operators screened calls. Some asked whether callers were “tribal,” and some of those Native calls, attorney Smith said, were ignored. This had to stop, she said.

Gayle Dahlman, the head dispatcher, said she “can’t confirm or disconfirm” the practice. Asking for tribal affiliation had to do with jurisdiction, she said.

This happened in Thurston County, and in that pistol-shaped corner of Nebraska, jurisdiction is a critical issue fraught with ill will.

The Winnebago and Omaha tribes both have land here, meaning three agencies – two tribal police forces and Thurston County deputies – are charged with protecting all residents.

Complicating matters further are policies like the Dawes Act of 1887, which sliced tribally owned lands into individual parcels, opening reservations to white settlers.

So today, the county is a checkerboard of tribal and white-owned lands. And tensions occasionally smolder over who controls what, as some territory still remains in dispute.

“It’s a mess here in Thurston County,” said Thurston County Sheriff Chris Kleinberg. “It is so screwed up, no one is benefiting from it.”

The mess thickened in the late 1990s, when Thurston County reorganized its addressing system. The tribes kept their style of addressing, which was incompatible with the county’s refurbished 911 dispatching system, and some Native residents encountered delays when calling for help.

Ed Tyndall, chief of police for the Omaha Nation, said inefficiencies often caused those delays.

“A call comes in from an Indian, and a tribal police officer is a block away, but 911 sends Thurston County” officers, who might be farther away, said Tyndall, illustrating the poor coordination. “This directly affects public safety in Thurston County.”

Sheriff Kleinberg and dispatcher Dahlman attribute these scenarios to the tribes’ incongruent address system, which the Winnebago tribe is changing. Without a uniform address system, some calls simply pop up as “tribal community” because the 911 database does not have addresses for those landline phone numbers from the tribe.

So if the dispatcher cannot locate an address and cannot ask whether the caller is a tribal resident, Dahlman said, Thurston County officers are sent to the reservations, even though tribal forces want to handle their own cases.

“So it helps to know whether callers are tribal,” Dahlman said. “But we’re in a Catch-22. What do we do? What don’t we do?”

Matching different police to different ethnic groups is secondary to sending help quickly, attorney Smith said. But because tribal courts are based on ethnicity, that is, they are for Indians only, Kleinberg adds that screening for tribal affiliation is an inevitable question in police matters.

“Law enforcement, as a whole, is trained not to segregate by skin color. In this area, that’s not possible,” said Kleinberg. “Depending on what part of the county you’re in, depending on whose land you’re on, depending on what your skin color is – we have to literally ask for someone’s race. I normally wouldn’t care about this. But I have to determine which laws apply and which court you go to.”

He said it is that division, that notion of different justice for different people, that fuels animosity in Thurston County, and it bleeds into the minutiae of everyday life, like 911. Kleinberg, of Chippewa descent, said working in Thurston County has changed the way he views himself.

“As a child, I grew up going to powwows and being real proud of the fact that my family is Native American,” he said. “Now I don’t even care about that part.”

“It makes me so nauseous, I’m not running in Thurston County again. I don’t want to determine what laws I follow on the basis of skin color. I took an oath that I would not do that. Unfortunately, the laws here say I have to do that.”



# WRITING HER OWN SCRIPT

**Valerie Red-Horse** has played many roles: Wife. Mother. Actress. Director. CEO. Pocahantas. Throughout it all, Red-Horse has managed to show the world who she is ... and who she isn't.

STORY BY **CHRISTINA DEVRIES**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**







## WRITING HER OWN SCRIPT: (THE VALERIE RED-HORSE STORY)

By Christina DeVries

### FADE IN

The lights come up on stage. We see two brothers ring a doorbell. A girl answers. The men chuckle when she appears.

"Jeez, she's got the Red-Horse traits for sure," one says, referring to her chestnut hair, her high cheek bones, her Cherokee skin. The girl smiles.

Inside the frugal two-bedroom house in Fresno, Calif., lives the girl, her mom and her sister. She'd never met her half-brothers. Her mother tracked them down. The father they all shared wasn't around when she was growing up. But today, she's meeting two of her brothers for the first time.

The door clicks shut, and the three siblings disappear inside.

. . . .

If life were only that simple: End scene, move on, break for intermission. But for Valerie Red-Horse, her father's neglect was just a beginning. The scene became a marker in a lifelong fight to prove who she was and who she was not. Mixed blood. Native. White. Poor. Rich. Ugly. Beautiful. Mother. Christian. Filmmaker. Actress. Activist. Entrepreneur. Red-Horse had her own storyline to create, and for most of that story she tried desperately not to be squashed under other people's stage directions or critical reviews.

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## VALERIE'S VISIONS

VALERIE RED-HORSE HAS HAD SEVERAL FILMMAKING ROLES, FROM WRITER TO DIRECTOR TO ACTRESS AND MORE.

SOURCES: INTERNET MOVIE DATABASE, VALERIREDHORSE.COM  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

### 1995

MY INDIAN  
SUMMER

WRITER and  
EMMY RECIPIENT

for this  
documentary  
about a Native  
teen learning his  
culture.

NATURALLY  
NATIVE

WRITER, DIRECTOR,  
PRODUCER and  
ACTRESS in this  
film about three  
sisters who sell  
Native cosmetics  
made using tribal  
remedies.

### 1998



**ACT I, Scene I  
Fresno, California: 1968  
(Enter: God)**

When summer in Fresno sizzled, Red-Horse's mother drenched bed sheets with water to hold the molten air at bay.

Most days, the stifling heat was a backdrop for afternoon adventures pumping down the street on two wheels.

Except for this one time.

On that day, the Armenian Evangelical Church was hosting a Vacation Bible School. But the 9-year-old saw suckers and balloons outside.

Furiously pedaling the rest of the way home, she begged to go. Mom finally gave it her blessing.

Sitting in a small annex of the church, on a gray folding chair, she listened to Pastor Sivis delivering The Word. Then it struck. What Red-Horse calls the most illogical moment of her life: The nerdy, award-winning, science-loving student stupefied by the power of a spiritual message. The sugar-coated dream faded out, and the spirit moved in.

**Scene II  
Fresno: 1973-1977**

Cheerleader, drama club president, student government, valedictorian, math team, forensic debate team, marching band, school newspaper editor and homecoming court. Her mark was all over McLane High School, and the yearbook photos proved it. Around 70 in all, Asheley Farmer said. She should know. The two have been pals since age 14.

"(She) didn't do anything half-baked," Farmer said. Still, she got teased and taunted a lot. Her campaign poster was defaced: "Vote for Valerie Red-Horse." Her numerous awards bred jealousy: Why her? Why not us?

After all, she had that weird last name. She hailed from a place filled with immigrants and field workers. She had a single mom making ends meet on a Social Security pension. And of course, she had that Cherokee skin.

**Scene III  
University of California at Los Angeles: 1977**

At cheerleading practice on the football sidelines, she saw

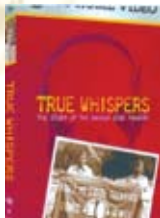


**VALERIE RED-HORSE** posed as a live model for the Mattel/Disney Pocahontas doll in the mid 1990s. Courtesy of Valerie Red-Horse.

**2003**

**TRUE WHISPERS**

**WRITER, DIRECTOR and PRODUCER** of this documentary about the Navajo Code Talkers of WWII.



**2005**

**TELEPHONE WARRIORS**

**WRITER, DIRECTOR and PRODUCER** of this documentary about Choctaw Code Talkers who helped during WWI.

**2007**

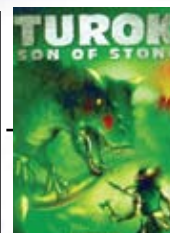
**ECHOTA**

**DIRECTOR** of this film epic about the first-elected Cherokee chief and his love for his people and his family.

**2008**

**TUROK: SON OF STONE**

**CONSULTANT** for this animated film in which the hero Turok fights to save his fallen tribe.





him. She stopped cheering. Her heart began thrashing. Although only a college freshman, she still knew it: Bruins offensive lineman Curt Mohl would be her husband.

She was right, too.

But UCLA wasn't just about finding Mr. Right. It was about jump-starting her acting dreams.

**Scene IV**  
**The newlyweds' apartment, Los Angeles: 1983**

A pale, red-haired, freckle-faced man sealed her fate again. His dislike of her depiction of a Native woman cost her yet another acting gig:

"You sound too educated to play a Native American woman," he said.

Enough. Casting directors wanted someone more Native. No, someone less Native.

She paced in their apartment, brooding and brooding.

"Val," her husband finally said, "why don't you just write for yourself? Cast yourself, start a production company."

So before long, Red-Horse Native Productions Inc., was off and running.



**OFF STAGE**

She'd been right about Mohl. The hulking lineman had transitioned from UCLA to the Oakland Raiders, from college boyfriend to husband. For almost 30 years, he'd been the love of her life. Her acting career didn't work like she'd hoped. But he did.

Their three children are proof: Courtney, 24, Derek, 20, and Chelsea, 11.

And her other endeavors, mostly, turned out to be a good ideas, too. Accolades came and went: Her film "Looks into the Night" won Best Live Action Short at the American Indian Film Festival. She is the director of the Hollywood Access Program for Natives. She received the 1999 Cherokee Medal of Honor.

For a girl trying to prove to the world who she was or wasn't, Valerie Red-Horse seemed to be doing pretty well.

**ACT II, Scene I**  
**Los Angeles, the family home: 4 a.m.**

The sun has yet to filter through the windows of her Southern California home, but she's already awake. It's part of her routine.

It's quiet time, to pray, to reflect, to make sense of the day. Which hat today? Mother? Financial adviser? Producer? Business owner? Better yet, how can each fit into her BlackBerry instead of a Mary Poppins bag?

**Scene II**  
**Navajo Reservation, New Mexico: 1999-2001**

"Ms. Red-Horse, we need to talk."

**VALERIE RED-HORSE** graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles' theatre arts department in 1981. *Courtesy of Valerie Red-Horse.*



The people she had spent the last year documenting had something to discuss. She'd been working on the story of the Navajo Code Talkers, men who'd created a secret code from their people's language for the U.S. Army in World War II.

However, the veterans feared she'd portray them in the wrong light. She was angry and bitter about their military service. They weren't.

After all, the men who were yanked from boarding schools were asked to use the language that had been forbidden at school to help win WWII.

"They were invaluable," Red-Horse said. "They go back to their reservations and are not given or granted or told about proper benefits and pensions."

Inexcusable. But even though she was livid, the Navajo veterans had long since reconciled their feelings.

"What it showed me is that as a director, it's not about me," Red-Horse said. "This is about them. ... From that point on, I've just such a different approach to everything I do."

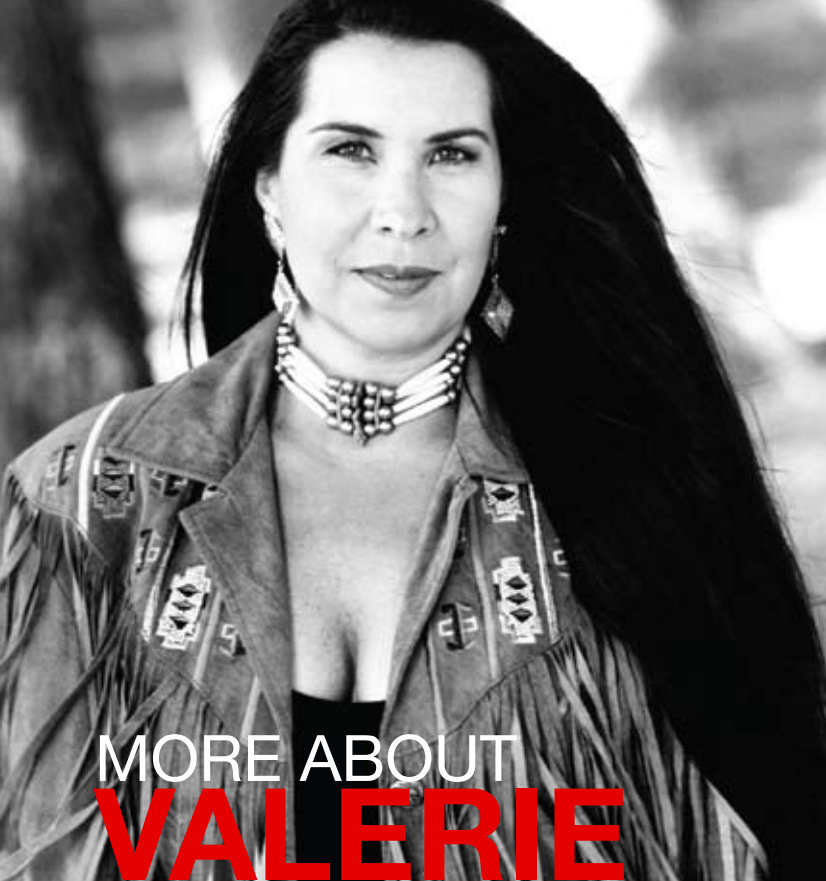
**Scene III**  
**New York, New York: 2001**

"Former actress becomes a key link for Wall Street and the reservation" blared a front-page headline in the Wall Street Journal. It was Sept. 6, less than a week before 9/11 and just days before the biggest scandal Red-Horse's recently purchased Wall Street brokerage firm would face.

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**VALERIE RED-HORSE** has worked in the film and television industry as a writer, director, producer and actress and is the founder of Red-Horse Native Productions Inc. *Courtesy of Valerie Red-Horse.*





## MORE ABOUT VALERIE

**AGE:** 50

**HOMETOWN:** Fresno, Calif.

**TRIBE:** Texas Cherokee

**EDUCATION:** UCLA BA in film and theater

**PROFESSION:** Investment banker and filmmaker

**WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?** My active mind

**WHAT INSPIRES YOU?** God's grace

**WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL?** My mother (age 90)

**WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU CHANGED YOUR**

**MIND ABOUT AN ISSUE?** All the time. We have unbelievable family discussions.

**WHAT MOTTO DO YOU LIVE BY?** Nothing ventured; nothing gained.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?** Looks and figure are not true measures of worth.

**IF YOU COULD HAVE ANOTHER PROFESSION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?** Novelist or talk show host.**BIGGEST PET PEEVE?** Wasting time and apathy

**WHAT'S YOUR BEST ADVICE TO YOUTH?** Your world has so many possibilities, believe in yourself and know that God created you as a beautiful person.

**PETS:** One adorable dog, Brutus, and about 14 exotic fish.

**WHO MAKES UP YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY?** Husband:

Curt, Children: Courtney, 25, Derek, 20, and Chelsea, 11

**IF YOU COULD CHANGE ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?** More employees **WHY?**

There is so much to do!!!

**WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST REGRET?** No regrets

**WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST FEAR?** Not following God's path for my life.

**WHAT ARE YOUR SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS?** To be the best wife and mother I can be while achieving business success that hopefully makes a difference in the world and always serving the Lord in ministry (both short and long term goals).

**MOVIE:** "Gone With The Wind"

**TV SHOW:** Football and basketball playoffs

**BOOK:** Holy Bible

**MUSIC:** Journey

**PLACE:** My home

**FOOD:** Cherry On Top yogurt with fresh fruit

Before Red-Horse took over, an employee bought an investment that was supposed to be a gain for the company. Instead it was a debt, which hurled the company into technical bankruptcy. Regulation-wise, the company was fine. But from the PR side, it was a nightmare.

The company, which had little credibility entering the market with the sharks of Wall Street, had already screwed up. Did Red-Horse, a woman, a Native woman, without a formal business background, know what she was doing?

The employee's investment choice was a multimillion-dollar mistake. After 9/11, the loss of such a large sum made the Wall Street Journal opinion page: Accusations that Red-Horse had used the lost money to fund terrorists.

Phone calls every morning, more bad news, more business trips, more than half the next year spent away from home, more fighting with her husband.

### Scene IV

**Los Angeles, a hospital waiting room: 2007**

Red-Horse is sprawled across hospital waiting room chairs, praying.

She endured the fallout of bad investments and preserved her marriage. But this she couldn't control.

After her family returned from a weeklong Christian mission trip to the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, her son Derek complained of stomach pain.

It's a bad hamburger, she thought, giving him a couple pain pills.

The pain didn't stop. Derek's appendix burst. At the hospital, he had a 50-50 chance of surviving the surgery.

With all she knew, none of it was medical. She knew she loved him. And she knew she couldn't bear losing her son because she'd chalked it up to a bad hamburger.

Then the doctor entered the waiting room after a seven-hour surgery: Her son would survive.

### Act III, Scene I

**Mescalero Apache Tribe Inn, New Mexico: 2008**

She's on yet another business trip. This time she's working with the Mescalero Apache Tribe. But tonight she's at dinner with her husband.

Soon, a woman approaches the table. It's Pam Cordova, the lone female tribal council member, someone Red-Horse had met earlier. Cordova has a gift, something to remember



**VALERIE RED-HORSE** wrote the screenplay and starred in "Lozen," the true story of a female Apache warrior who fought with Victorio and Geronimo. The film hasn't been produced yet, but "It launched my film career," said Red-Horse, who is in the center of this photo. *Courtesy of Valerie Red-Horse.*

her by. It's a pair of earrings shaped like circular dream catchers.

The two women had met to discuss tribal finances. However, Cordova says, their connection was deeper than a business interaction.

"Almost like ... I was related to her and she was related to me. Not because we're both Native, there's a word for it ... I felt like she was my sister."

Both Cordova and Red-Horse have worked for years as lone women surrounded by men, holding their own and standing up for themselves and their communities. Together, they found common ground.

Later Red-Horse thanked Cordova for her generosity with a gift of her own, another pair of earrings, her personal favorites, ones that were long and beaded.

## Scene II The family's living room: Aug. 24, 2009

Happy Birthday!

The curtains open to reveal a living room packed with guests. We see the birthday girl's mother sitting on the sofa. There's Asheley Farmer. Curt. All three kids. Her pastor. More neighbors. Acting pals. Nearly 75 people packed on the stage to celebrate her life.

The group has migrated, crowding around a rented movie projector.

Then the cluster of people quiets as the screen comes to life. A model for the Mattel Pocahontas doll flashes across the screen. Then the Junior Miss Fresno. Snapshots of an aspiring actress. A couple kissing. A Bruins cheerleader. A mother and child swimming together. Each one a glimpse of a different stage, a different stage direction.

"She's only 50," Courtney said. "That still seems so young to me."

**FADE OUT** 🕒








**LISA DRUM** holds  
one of her designs  
up to the light  
at her house in  
Walthill, Neb.  
*Photos by Clay  
Lomneth.*

Through years of cultural annihilation and ethnic persecution, Native American artists have kept their customs alive. Using song, film, painting, pottery and other artistic media, they have defined themselves and sustained tribal traditions.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a golden, ornate object, possibly a piece of jewelry or a decorative item. The object has intricate, leaf-like patterns. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a window with light coming through. The overall tone is warm and artistic.

# THE ART OF SURVIVAL

STORY BY CHRISTINA DEVRIES  
PHOTOS BY CLAY LOMNETH



The stage lights shine down an iridescent glow as she makes her way across the stage. Behind her are a drum set, guitarists and backup singers. But in front of her is an audience waiting for her voice to empower them. Her hips sway. Her hands pierce the air as her voice bellows across the crowd looking up at her.

*“The reservation out at poverty row,  
There’s something cooking, and the lights are low.  
Somebody’s trying to save our mother earth.*

*I’m gonna help ‘em,  
to save it,  
and sing it,  
and pray it,*

*Singin’  
No, No, Keshagesh  
You can’t do that.  
No more, no more, no more.”*

Buffy Sainte-Marie, a Cree who like many other Native female artists, is a narrator of her culture. “No, No, Keshagesh,” above, is a song by Sainte-Marie (Cree) dedicated to standing up in the face of Keshagesh, a Cree word Sainte-Marie defines as greed. Her voice has echoed for generations, singing songs about and for her Native people. She’s often recognized for the songs she sang on the children’s TV program “Sesame Street.” Since the early 1960s she has heralded the issues of Native people into her work.

## Keeping their cultures alive

For decades, Native women artists have been historians and auditors of their past and future. They are symbols of Indigenous America’s perseverance. These female artists are a constant visual and audible reminder of cultural endurance and existence. Their crafts survived the Greasy Grass (Battle of Little Big Horn), Wounded Knee one (1890) and two (1973). Their spirits survived the Trail of Tears, the Relocation and Termination program and continued struggles against cultural annihilation.

“I think the importance of artists in the Native American community is more than just an aesthetic museum type of experience,” said Valerie Red-Horse, a Cherokee filmmaker. “For us, it was survival. When you think about the experiences our communities have survived, they’ve sustained through war and not just war, but persecution, annihilation, cultural annihilation.” To work through the past, Red-Horse uses her creative expression.

“We’ve used art as our way of defining ourselves and expressing ourselves religiously, spiritually,” Red-Horse said. “Our language base, everything has gone into that expression. So our art is really an identity. It’s so important to look at the art to understand the unique culture of the Native American tribes, and part of our sustainability and our survival ties directly into that art.”

Cultural retention of the arts can come through the continued practice of traditions. Lisa Drum, an Omaha beadworker and mother of three, teaches her daughters her craft. Only two of her daughters have a focused interest in creating similar beadwork, but it is this interest that will help carry beadworking on into future generations. This practice of traditions is similar for



Catherine Nagy Mowry, a Miami, the creation of cornhusk dolls helps preserve her connection to her culture. In the early 1990s she felt the traditional ways of doll making were being lost, so she started creating the cornhusk dolls. Traditionally, doll makers would raise their own cornhusks, but Mowry said today she can’t raise enough for all her dolls, so she keeps the traditional elements in her dolls through different ways. The dolls are dressed in traditional Miami fashion, from their moccasins to the intricate ribbon work and hairpieces.

The individual voices of contemporary Native American art-



ists, like Sainte-Marie, Red-Horse and Mowry, have introduced a new understanding of the issues Native women face and have faced in the past. Their voices showcase their people's experiences.

### Art that tells a history

In the past, Native artists were not recognized as individuals in the same ways contemporary artists are. Most artists and tribal members could and still can recognize their work and the work of others, Da-

vid Penny wrote in his book "North American Indian Art." But the recognition is not aimed at individual artists. The focus on creating pottery, weaving a basket or beading placed spotlights on the creations instead. Thus, the object created or embellished was embracing both cultural and societal purposes.

Still, the individual Native voice has emerged as a powerful one. Native women artists have ushered into the contemporary Native art world a push for artists to create material and content for themselves and

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**LISA DRUM** is an artist who lives with her three daughters in Walthill, Neb. "How you dress your children or how they appear in public is a sign of your love for them," Drum said.  
*Photo by Clay Lomneth.*





A **HOPI** woman (left) weaves a basket.  
*National Archives and Records Administration*

A **PAPAGO** woman (below) weaving baskets.  
*National Archives and Records Administration.*



A **HOPI** pottermaker (above) displays some of her work.  
*National Archives and Records Administration*

from their experiences. While Sainte-Marie constructs lyrics to make her audience think about the voices of Native America, Native filmmakers document visual capsules of Native history, painters coat their roles in history on paper and canvas, and potters shape their cultural roots with current and innovative techniques. Each is striving to create links between their histories and their present Native lives.

Some of these artists honed their skills around the kitchen tables of their mothers, aunts, grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Others started their art educations in their homes and backyards and then continued at a collegiate institute devoted to cultivating Native arts. Around the same time Sainte-Marie graduated from college to pursue a career as a Native folk singer, Linda Lomahaftewa, a Hopi/Choctaw, was entering an educational program specifically for Native artists at the Institute of American Indian Arts. And like Sainte-Marie, she used her work as a narrative for her people.

Lomahaftewa studied painting at IAIA. Her Hopi and Choctaw heritage have been her source of inspiration and a cultural offering.

“My paintings tell stories about being Hopi,” Lomahaftewa said. “Being Hopi means praying, having respect for everything, believing that everything has a purpose. ... I have this prayer when I’m working — not only for myself, but for all people.

### Art school with a Native vision

The IAIA in Santa Fe, N.M., opened in 1962 through federal funding. It was the first college to devote its curriculum to the development of Native artists. As the Institute gets closer to celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2012, more than 547 federally recognized tribes have had students attend IAIA. The school became a funnel for Native artists to channel how they felt about their world.

In her book “Native America Collected,” Margaret Dubin



A **NAVAJO** woman uses a loom to weave.  
*National Archives and Records Administration.*

wrote, “In the spirit of Red Power and the civil rights movement, IAIA’s artist-warriors used their art to express the profound anger and disappointment about the persistent discrimination against Native America.” IAIA students have continued to challenge and redefine what it means to be Native.

To keep the spirit of individual artists evolving, the IAIA has created a new endeavor to define major issues within contemporary Native America through the arts. The Vision Project is a cooperative of future pan-tribal artists who ask questions about the roles of Native art in its context to the larger art world, the evolution of traditional art and the processes of identity seen in Native art. At the conclusion of this project, the finished work will include a film, a book and an exhibition.

Part of the Vision Project’s final product contains a medium that could be considered on the forefront of creative Native storytelling: the production of films. The mass appeal of presenting information in film broadens the viewing audience to stretch through reservations, city and state boundaries. In recent years, filmmaker Red-Horse (Cherokee) has stepped out as a prominent leader in Native film production.

“I absolutely think that art and different forms of art can ex-

press and explain a lot of who we are as Native people and the different obstacles and challenges we face,” Red-Horse said. “I also think art — especially film, film and narrative stories, storytelling whether it’s oral tradition or the written word — can explain a lot from both sides. So I don’t think we have to be stereotyped or romanticized. We’re not all good. We’re not all bad. We’re not all anything. We’re not homogeneous. It’s not all one color: We’re multicolored and multifaceted.”

Her production company, Red-Horse Native Productions Inc., has made films featuring multifaceted Native stories. The company’s first independent film, “Naturally Native,” premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 1998. Nearly 10 years later, she hasn’t slowed the pace of her productions. Her documentary, “True Whispers: The Story of the Navajo Code Talkers,” furthers the stories of the Navajo men who worked for the U.S. government in World War II and who used their people’s language as a code against the Japanese. Red-Horse’s innovative, visual storytelling through in-depth interviews, historical footage and documents has led thousands of people to a better understanding of Native history and culture.

Lois Smoky, Kiowa, was also an innovator. Born in 1907, she



was one of a select group of Kiowa artists, the Kiowa Five, and the group's only woman. Her work as a painter, along with that of her male colleagues, was featured in the first book on Native art, "Kiowa Indian Art." Her paintings showcase women's roles as mothers and caregivers within her society. In "Lullaby," a Kiowa woman, placed on a mustard background dressed in traditional clothing, stands

facing her child in a cradleboard. Her body is centered to her child, raised at arms length, and the child's eyes are directed toward its mother. The figures look flat, but the painting effects a symbiosis created

between mother and child. Previous to her work, Kiowa women would create art and clothing for their people. Men did most of the painting on tipis and animal hides. Smoky was among the first Native women to be formally trained in art.

"Gender distinctions in Native America dictated which arts were produced," Michael Kampen-O'Riley wrote in his book "Art Beyond the West." "Usually, women made pottery, basketry and fiber arts, and undertook their decoration with porcupine quills and beads." While gender did play a distinct role in who created what, it played no role in limiting creative intuitions.

Innovation, creation, tradition

One Native artist who defined the image of Southwest-

ern Native pottery was Maria Martinez, San Ildefonso Pueblo. Martinez's pots are known for their black-on-black sheen. In an oxygen-rich clay-firing process, the clay turns red. In an oxygen-free firing, the clay will turn black. Martinez created an oxygen-free firing by smothering her pottery in soil from her Rio Grand River Valley homeland in New Mexico.

Martinez's firing techniques were not the only innovation she brought to Native pottery.

She created carvings in her pots both before and after firing. This process became known as sgraffito. The pots she created appear to have multiple layers of black sheen. Martinez was also one of the first potters encouraged to sign her work. Most Native artists did not sign their work and assumed their skill or specific style was signature enough. An art patron encouraged her to include her signature, hoping it would familiarize collectors with her work. At first, she signed Marie in order to present a name non-Pueblos could recognize. Later, her signatures varied. She often signed both Marie and the name of any person who helped her create the pot.

Martinez learned the sacred creation of pottery from her people and molded her work to forms, which enticed and intrigued people outside of her community. Her popularity during her lifetime placed her in the position to redefine what Native pottery was in both technical and aesthetic ways.

The future of Native art is in a state of transformation. As the world around each artist develops and changes, so do the artists. Pressed against a constant crux to juxtapose the Native world and an outside world, Native artists continue to merge both worlds through traditional means while also addressing current issues. These artists must decide how to express their individual ideas and also how to express the ideas that define their peoples — current issues, past issues

**"IT'S (THE ART) LIKE THE LANGUAGE WE'RE LOSING. WE'VE GOT TO IMMERS THEM. WE'VE GOT TO KEEP IT GOING, BECUASE NO ONE ELSE CAN DO IT."**

— CINDY WHITE THUNDER  
LAKOTA ARTIST

# THEIR WORDS

THREE WOMEN SHARE THOUGHTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ART TO NATIVES AND THE SURVIVAL OF NATIVE CULTURES.

"[THE ART] IS LIKE THE LANGUAGE WE'RE LOSING. WE'VE GOT TO IMMERS THEM ... WE GOT TO KEEP IT GOING ... BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE CAN DO IT."

— CINDY WHITE THUNDER  
LAKOTA BEADWORKER

"IN THE SPIRIT OF RED POWER AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, IAIA'S [INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS] ARTIST-WARRIORS USED THEIR ART TO EXPRESS THE PROFOUND ANGER AND DISAPPOINTMENT ABOUT THE PERSISTENT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NATIVE AMERICA."

—MARGARET DUBIN  
AUTHOR, "NATIVE AMERICA COLLECTED"

"WE'VE USED ART AS OUR WAY OF DEFINING OURSELVES AND EXPRESSING OURSELVES, RELIGIOUSLY, SPIRITUALLY, OUR LANGUAGE BASE, EVERYTHING HAS GONE INTO THAT EXPRESSION. SO OUR ART IS REALLY AN IDENTITY. IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT THE ART TO UNDERSTAND THE UNIQUE CULTURE OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES AND PART OF OUR SUSTAINABILITY AND OUR SURVIVAL TIES DIRECTLY INTO THAT ART."

— VALERIE RED-HORSE  
CHEROKEE FILMMAKER



**LISA DRUM** has been sewing regalia for her children since they were little. Two out of her three daughters have taken an interest in dancing and the creation of regalia and moccasins, learning what they can from her. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*

or a combination of a personal journey. No formula fits all. For some, their content is historical. For others, it is emotional. And for others, their content has been handed down for generations.

For Lakota artist Cindy White Thunder, her beadwork has been a tradition passed down to her by her grandmother and aunts. She started beading at age 8, and now, at 43, she wants to make sure her art is not lost to the next generation. “A lot of them (children) don’t find interest (in beading),” White Thunder said. “It’s up to adults to show them. It’s part of their being, their life and their history.”

As a child, White Thunder remembers watching her grandmother bead with sinew. Even as a young girl, White Thunder felt beading was something she wanted to do.

“It’s (the art) like the language we’re losing,” she said. “We’ve got to immerse them. ... We got to keep it going ... because no one else can do it.”

Art is the future for her children, she says. It’s a positive outlet, a tool to use to relax and spend time with those you love. “I don’t care what color you are,” White Thunder said. “Wouldn’t you encourage that?”

White Thunder now teaches the beadwork she learned to her grandchildren. The work itself, White Thunder says, is an expression of her history, but also a combatant in her life. When she beads, she de-stresses. Sitting on her front porch she beads with the South Dakota hills at her side. While she strings beads into intricate patterns for pipe bags, she also lets go of the day’s stresses. She can relax, meditate. Beading allows her to cope with the world around her.

## Rhymes with a reason

Hope Brings Plenty is a Lakota rapper and songwriter who

lives on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. As Lady Hope, her stage name, she creates her art from her life experiences and her surroundings, and her preferred medium is music, specifically rap music. Unlike Sainte-Marie, Brings Plenty, has yet to receive national credit for her work. But, like White Thunder, her work is an outlet for her life. Her lyrics stream through her MySpace page, and her message is spread through word of mouth. Since 2002, she’s been rapping and waiting for more people to notice her work.

Despite the opposite ends of success, both Sainte-Marie and Brings Plenty sing, or rap in Brings Plenty’s case, about issues close to their communities: about living in poverty, finding a place in the modern world, dealing with alcohol, preserving their culture and environment, and confronting corporate greed. Although the way Brings Plenty expresses the world she is a part of may be different from Sainte-Marie or Smoky or Martinez or Red-Horse, the cultures in which each woman comes from will still be retained. The history and traditions of Native people will, too. But the reactions to the world Native women artists put into form, how they feel about their context and content, will likely continue to evolve.

Brings Plenty’s lyrics are an example of a life peppered with strife, a life still being defined. “In this time, no world is ours,” she sings. “(The) Northern Plains remains the same.” The refrain of her “Black Hillz Storiez” melody is equally foreboding. “Whatchu know about my life, strugglin’ just to get by. This is my story,” her wispy voice echoes in the background and into the future she’s creating for herself and her people. Smoky, Martinez, those involved in the Vision Project and the artists passing through the IAIA doors have defined their cultural voices through their art. Brings Plenty could, too. ☺

**ON THE WEB**  
nativedaughters.org



Valerie Red-Horse believes art defines Native Americans religiously and spiritually, even its use of the language base.



Red-Horse said art can express who Native people are and the obstacles and challenges they face.



Links to more photos and facts about Native artists.





**MARIE WATT** is an artist from Seattle who works a lot with people of different ages and skill levels all across the country. "I became interested in blankets in my work partly because they were these common-place objects that we all take for granted, but they have these extraordinary histories of use," she said. "As a Native woman, I was really interested in how we have this tradition of giving away blankets to honor people."

*Photos by Clay Lomneth.*



# THE FIGHT AGAINST FRAUDS

## NATIVE ARTISTS STRUGGLE TO COMPETE WITH COUNTERFEIT PIECES OF ARTWORK

STORY BY CHRISTINA DEVRIES

**T**he land and the sheep, with their wool, belong to the Navajo women. The weaving looms belong to the Navajo women. The designs, patterns and inspirations for their woven rugs belong to the women, too. The process of Navajo rug making, both intrinsic and physical, have flowed through the women of the tribe for generations.

However, prior to 1935, authentic rugs produced and sold by Navajos were copied and mass-produced by non-Native businesses. These businesses usually made rugs in factories outside the U.S., only to import the rugs and sell each as a genuine piece of Native work. The market for Native art was flooded with fakes. But, the income these women used to generate from their rugs was as dry as the deserts on their Native land.

Navajo rug makers were not alone. For decades, Native artists have seen the work they do be forged by non-Natives. Large profits went to individual businesses rather than to Native artists. This fraud was addressed by federal legislation in the 1935 Indian Arts and Crafts Act and then amended in a 1990 Act; these laws are crucial in the fight for the rights of Native Artists.

Suzan Shown Harjo, a Cheyenne Muscogee, has been fighting for rights of Native Americans for decades. Through her nonprofit organization, the Morning Star Institute, she advocates for Native people's rights both culturally and traditionally.

"The fake Indians are taking over the fields and kind of edging out a lot of the real Indians," Harjo, director of the Morning Star Institute, said. "They (non-Indians) are standing in the way of income, they're gatekeepers, they are in positions to set policies."

The original act, passed during the Great Depression, was aimed at stimulating income for Native artists, for whom wage-earning jobs were scarce, especially on reservations. For the artists to benefit from the sale of their goods, the frauds in the market had to disappear. Under the 1935 legislation, the federal government could prosecute those who promoted or sold fraudulent Native art.

But, in the 50 years following the 1935 act, not one count of fraud was ever brought to a courtroom by U.S. attorneys.

The 1990 act stiffened penalties and made the prosecution process of selling fraudulent items easier. Fines increased dramatically. A business that was marketing art as authentic Native art could face fines of up to \$1 million for a first offense. With a heightened awareness to the issue on both sides, the buyers and sellers of Native art, the 1990 act was more meant to be effective.

However, according to a 2005 report from the Office of Inspector General, the law does little to protect Indian artists. The report said the law was "practically unenforceable and does not provide adequate authority to the IACB [Indian Arts and Crafts Board]." The study also concluded the IACB's enforcement

couldn't show a "measurable decrease in counterfeit activity."

So, even with stiffened penalties the revised act still ran into enforcement issues. The enforcement of the law however, is still up to federal authorities in the case of the Navajo Nation.

Kathleen Bowman, the director of the public defenders office and an attorney for the Navajo Nation, said the law is only prosecuted on the federal level. Since the law isn't codified into Navajo Nation law, she's not in a position to use it.

"I'm sure people are prosecuted," she said. However, she doesn't bring any cases of enforcement to the federal courts.

One aspect of the law, which some see as a positive is the shifted control from the U.S. government to the tribes to designate who was qualified to represent a Native American artist.

"It (the act) meant that Native artists could actually make a living doing their own art and could do their own innovations on their own ... (and) make their own trends in Native art without those things being dictated by non-Native people," Harjo said.


The amended act also gave tribes more sovereign control. They could determine who could promote him- or herself as a Native artist.

"It bows to tribal sovereignty," Harjo said. "The only test in the law is whether or not the person is Indian."

Even though some tribes still use the blood quantum system to determine tribal membership, others have transitioned to a different standard. In this process a person must only show he or she has descended from other Native people.

"The minute you say blood quantum it injects race," Harjo said. "I think we are on more solid ground if we stick to the political distinctions because most of the federal Indian law is based on political distinction. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act is fine with that. It doesn't say quarter blood or impose any kind of standard; it just says you have to be a citizen or a member of the tribe."

With the amendments, the 1990 act continues to support three things: authenticity, economic support for Native artists and protection for collectors to know they are buying legitimate Native creations.

For the Navajo rug making community, support for authentic rug making is coming from inside the Navajo community. Adopt an Elder program, a nonprofit program, provides elders with partners from younger generations to support them in their traditional way of life. The support through the program is twofold or even tri-fold. Authenticity is one part: More than 500 elders are supported by the program to teach younger generations about traditional ways of rug weaving. This supports the continued traditional ways of Navajo rug weaving. The final part is the support of elders within the community. As the old ways of life on the land becomes more obsolete, the younger people paired with the elders bring them food, firewood or other supplies at their request. The reconnection with the past helps all three of these aspects come full circle to support a larger community of Native artists. 



# YOUTH MOVEMENT

## NATIVE STUDENTS TAKE A DAY TRIP TO FIND THEMSELVES IN PHOTOS, ARTWORK

STORY BY **MOLLY YOUNG**

On a rainy March afternoon, Native America's future viewed an art gallery filled with Native America's past and present. Beef commods. Hollywood Indians. Pendleton blankets.

Together, seven Omaha Nation middle school and high school students and their art teacher viewed the artwork, showcased in the Sheldon Museum of Art's "Migrations" exhibit. The exhibit, billed as "new directions in Native American art," featured six Native artists' works.

It was pure coincidence the girls saw the artwork at all. Earlier that morning, the group had arrived at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a three-hour drive from their hometown of Macy, Neb. Many of the older students were featured in a Native Daughters portrait exhibit displayed that week in the Nebraska Union on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. Kathy Turner, the girls' art teacher, arranged for them to see the photo exhibit.

But they couldn't miss the Sheldon, where an incredible stack of Pendleton blankets stood in the middle of the "Migrations" gallery.

"How many do you think are in here?" asked Lauren, a high school senior with long black hair and bright Nike high-tops. Another friend asked how they blankets remained stable. Nearby, a third girl sketched in the next room. Two joked about a goofy comic strip.

That afternoon, the newest directions in Native American art weren't hanging on the walls.

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(TOP) **ALEXA TYNDALL**, 17, sketches a horse during some down time of the tour of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Tyndall said she wants to get into animati.

(BOTTOM) **FAITH LYONS**, 17, looks at the Migrations exhibit at the Sheldon art gallery in Lincoln, Neb. Some high school girls from Macy, Neb., came to visit the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as part of the Native Daughters project.

*Photos by Clay Lomneth.*



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**MARIA DICK**, 12, reads a book about horses at the Sheldon Art museum when she and other Native high school girls from Macy, Neb., came to UNL for a visit.  
*Photo by Clay Lomneth.*





# STANDING HER GROUND

Environmental activist **Winona LaDuke** has chained herself to a fence in protest, written eco-literature and even run for vice president on Ralph Nader's Green Party ticket. While most of America is busy talking about issues, LaDuke is grabbing her hoe and getting to work. And she has no time to be nice about it.

STORY BY **CARSON VAUGHAN**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**





lectric-powered exercise equipment. She doesn't get it. Well, she gets it, but she's not amused. Machines that require energy to help you burn energy? Who's coming up with this shit? We don't really cook, either. We just eat. We don't produce, we just consume. It's a desk-job mentality, devoid of dignity and at odds with the natural world.

"I have to explain to my kids, 'A hoe is a tool you use in the garden,'" she says slowly, emphatically, in cadence. "The reality is that working in the garden and chopping wood – I don't need a shrink to have a woodpile. We spend all our time doing all these fancy things to work out, but if you just actually had a life, then you would probably be pretty healthy."

And she's on to the next question. The local TV station will later cut it from the lecture tape because the aging, white-haired beatnik who asked it just wasted her time.

"Did you say that the Ojibwe calendar is based on the cycles of the seasons?" he asks cautiously, as though slowly unraveling a complex logarithmic equation, as if he had never read an ounce of Native literature in his 64 years.

"Yes," she says succinctly.

"That's interesting," he replies.

But it's not what she came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to talk about. And it's a question leading nowhere. She doesn't have time for this. She didn't fly 500 miles from the White Earth Indian Reservation in northwest Minnesota to explain the fundamentals. She didn't interrupt her work at Honor the Earth, the national initiative she founded to support grassroots Native environmental groups, only to reaffirm the elementary. And she didn't freeze the White Earth Land Recovery Project to answer this question.

Today, she's lecturing at UNL, condemning nuclear power and making wisecracks about the "smart guys from the university." She's defining environmental sustainability and promoting tribal re-localization, defaming multinational corporations and defending the Green Party's role in the 2000 presidential election. She's making you laugh and, she hopes, making you feel like a complete idiot.

"I think about white people every day," she says. "But white people don't think about us, because they don't want to face reality."

And suddenly those smart guys from the university are listening. And so are you, because you're intimidated; you realize this woman isn't the dull-witted, slow-talking cigar-box Indian the media primed you for. This is the contemporary Anishinaabeg environmental activist Winona LaDuke – and she is smarter than you.

## Set apart from the start

Ralph Nader met LaDuke in a hotel bar. He needed a vice president, and she had a record, he said. She had a record for social justice and a "worldwide reach with indigenous peoples subjected to severe deprivations." It's what the Green Party needed – a record. As the bartender set down two cans of Coca-Cola, LaDuke clutched the cold aluminum and pushed them back toward the waiter, tersely stating, "Those won't be needed."

"That told me something about her," Nader said. "She didn't like the drink, she didn't like the company, the corporation, and that wasn't the way she wanted to be introduced to me."

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### WINONA LADUKE

speaks at the 2008 Honor the Earth celebration at Tom's Burned Down Cafe in LaPointe, Wis. *Emily Hart Photography.*









Activism runs in her blood, as native to her disposition as the wild rice to her reservation. Her father, Vincent LaDuke, an Anishinaabeg Indian and member of the White Earth Tribe, was peddling wild rice in Greenwich Village, N.Y., when he met Betty Bernstein, a first generation Jewish-American. Both political activists, they eloped and fled to Los Angeles, where Betty studied art in college and Vince helped organize the Indian movement while working as an extra in the Westerns.

In 1959, Winona was born, the product of two social and political activists in the termination era. Thirty-five years later, she found herself chained to the front gate of a phone book printing plant, protesting the clear-cutting process – logging both new and old growth – for paper production. Winona LaDuke never stood a chance.

When Betty and Vince's marriage collapsed in 1964, Winona moved with her mother to Ashland, Ore., a "redneck town" where she found neither Jews nor fellow Natives. Instead, LaDuke found herself in a sea of white, that "social construct that denies people identity."

"I grew up thinking of myself as Indian," she told *People Magazine*. "I was the darkest person in my school. You just know you don't fit in."

And, truth be told, she doesn't really fit in now – not in Ashland (although she now wears cowboy boots) or Los Angeles, not in Nebraska or the White Earth Indian Reservation. When she speaks, her long brown hair – frayed at the tips and pulled back from her forehead – moves at her sides and the muscles in her angular jaw define themselves with every word. Her deep-set eyes, shadowed by the cavernous sockets around them, roll with every annoyance and lure you in with every squint and bulge. But it's her obsession, her passion, palpable from the first word to the last, that sets her apart – a scarlet letter on a Native daughter.

**"I THINK ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE EVERY DAY. BUT WHITE PEOPLE DON'T THINK ABOUT US, BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO FACE REALITY."**

—WINONA LADUKE  
ANISHINAABEG ACTIVIST

"It's her heart," says adopted daughter Ashley Stevens, 21, who moved in with LaDuke on her 12th birthday. "It's amazing that she took in two extra kids when she just had a baby and was running for vice president of America. The work that she's doing is such good work and work that needs to be done. It's hard, time-consuming work, and she's doing it every day, sun up to sun down."

At 50, LaDuke has accomplished more than most people twice her age ever do. Like a small-town honor

student's high school resume, Winona's accomplishments pile up in wild proportions, filled to the brim with activities and achievements that only acute boredom or sincere desperation can spawn. She did all this – and it sure as hell wasn't about acceptance.

LaDuke ran on the Green Party ticket with Nader in both 1996 and 2000. She believed in him. He believed in her. She calls him her Lebanese uncle, "a cool dude, kind, pretty damn smart." A hero. He calls her a frontierswoman. Resilient. So of course, in both 2004 and 2008, bearing no obligation to loyalty, she backed the other guy for president.

"That was her worst performance," Nader says. "Because it wasn't anything over policy. It wasn't like I changed my view on this and that and she disagreed. It was just going along with the least worst of the two major candidates, which is what I thought she had gotten over when she became my vice presidential candidate in 2000 with the Green Party."

She sure as hell isn't looking for acceptance.

She changed – and she'll change you

LaDuke stands behind another podium, just one of hundreds she'll stand behind before the year expires. This time she's in D.C., in a room filled with supposed business leaders and environmentalists gathered for the 2009 Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference. She admits she hates the city but acknowledges that it's better to visit when the "Great Black Father" is in office.

"I just want to welcome you to this green economy idea," LaDuke says, prodding those in attendance. "I've got to say, we're thinking we had about 30,000 years of it on the continent."

And they're laughing again – they always do. LaDuke has a way of shoving reality square in your face; it's abrasive, yet civil, biting humor and painfully serious.

"We did pretty darn good," she continues. "We got those 8,000 varieties of corn, got that passive solar, developed most of the world's pharmaceuticals, the natural kind before they turned into pills."

It's one hell of a gift. By lecture's end, they've forgotten what they disagreed with. Facts irrefutable. Waste undeniable. A close-up view of a shortsighted American mentality. A moment of truth in a schedule of deceit. A simple solution for a complex problem.

You don't need a shrink to have a woodpile.

Things changed during her freshman year at Harvard. She attended a lecture by Cherokee activist Jimmy Durham and no longer believed in "the Indian problem"; it was a government problem, and she would spend the next 32 years attempting to clean it up. She would write books, give lectures, run campaigns and petition major companies for cleanup on tribal lands. Durham sparked something in LaDuke that only LaDuke could handle.

"She knows who she is. She has a serious demeanor with intervals of humor, and that means that she can take pressure," Nader says. "And she's quite resilient."

# LADUKE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A LOOK AT THE MILESTONES IN THIS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST'S LIFE

GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

**1982**  
Earned her degree in rural economic development from Harvard University.

**1988**  
Awarded the Reebok Human Rights Award

**1992**  
Arrested for chaining herself to a gate at the GTE phone book plant in California to protest the clear-cutting process.

Appeared on Time magazine's "50 Most Important Women Under 40" list

**1994**



She's up against a lot of opposition and apathy, so she has to have that kind of civic personality."

## Impression, not carbon footprint

Tonight, LaDuke is eating dinner. Her local posse has gathered at The Dish, a restaurant just off UNL's campus, and the glasses are filled with red wine. They're discussing lighter topics, like Ralph Nader's germaphobia, her grandmother's physical fitness – and Italians. She likes Italians.

"Italians are easy for Indians to get along with," LaDuke jokes, her recessed brown eyes lighting up. "They're spontaneous like Indians. And they eat and drink a lot, too, unlike the Germans and English."

When the conversation dies, the chairs scoot back

and the group begins to disperse. LaDuke eyes a small piece of grilled duck left on the table. Whether it will be saved is not considered. The waiter reaches for the plate, but LaDuke stops him.

"I can take this to the kitchen and put it in a to-go box," he says warmly, innocently, already turning around.

For just a moment, the charisma drawing the party closer to her seat is no longer available. She's annoyed by the suggestion. It's imprudent, shortsighted, unsustainable.

"No. Don't. That'd be excessive," LaDuke says curtly, spontaneously.

She unrolls a paper napkin, wraps it around the left-over meat and places it in her pocket. She doesn't hate the waiter. It's the goddamn Styrofoam. ☹️

## WINONA LADUKE

speaks with Sarah Chayes, a reporter who had lived in Afghanistan since 2001 doing stories for National Public Radio. Both women came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to speak at the E.N. Thompson forum on March 4, 2009. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*

## ON THE WEB

[nativedaughters.org](http://nativedaughters.org)



Winona LaDuke explains that a hoe is a tool, and that's exercise.



Winona LaDuke is tired of waiting for smart people to help her.



Links to more photos and numbers about environmental issues.

# 1996

Ran as Ralph Nader's running mate in the year's presidential campaign

Named Ms. Magazine Woman of the year and debuted her first fiction novel, "Last Standing Woman"

# 1997

# 2000

Again runs as Ralph Nader's running mate

Inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame

# 2007

# 2008

Appeared on "The Colbert Report" June 12



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**THE BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK** in South Dakota is home to the largest grass prairie in the United States. Today, the land is subject to a number of environmental hazards born both inside and outside of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.  
*Photo by Clay Lomneth.*




# LAND ON LIFE SUPPORT

Water contamination and pollution plague Native American lands and cause significant health concerns. Native activists are addressing these issues while maintaining a relationship with their environment – its shattered past, unfortunate present and hopeful future.

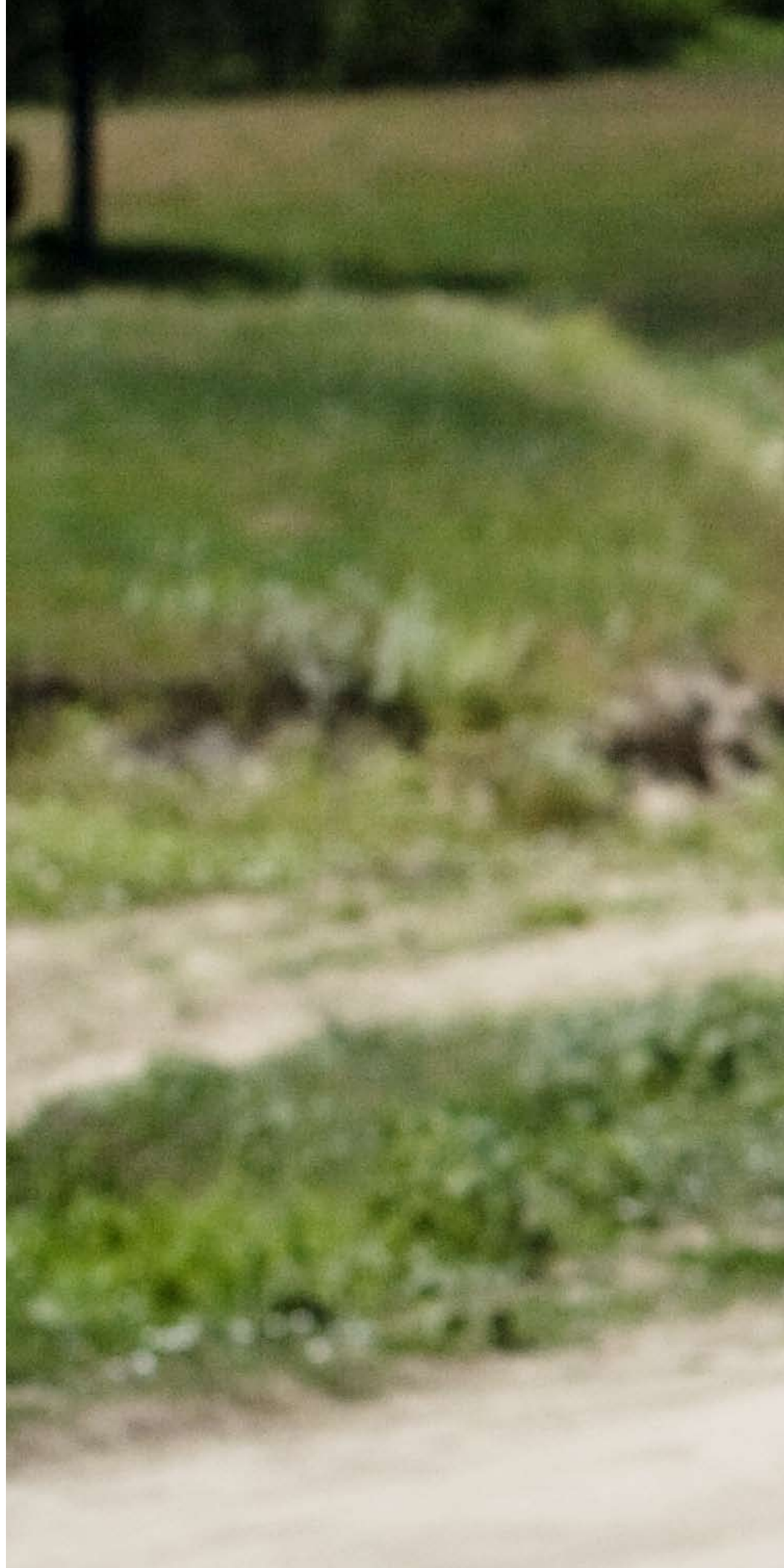
STORY BY **CARSON VAUGHAN**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**





Smoke loiters around her straight black hair as she licks the paper and rolls another cigarette. She wets her lips, takes a drag and begins again.

“A long time ago, we had a lot of relatives who really helped purify the water,” says 54-year-old **Debra White Plume**, the high plains and ponderosa pine stretching for miles outside her brown doublewide trailer on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. “They were all slaughtered as an economic decision of the American government. When they slaughtered the millions of buffalo, they impacted the environment more than they ever knew.”





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**DEBRA WHITE PLUME**'s two horse tattoos represent her two sons. She has been fighting a Canadian uranium mining company from setting up near Pine Ridge and contaminating the water further. "Without water, there is no life," White Plume said. "Contamination will affect us and our future generations as well." *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*



Nine years ago, White Plume, an Oglala Lakota environmental activist, fell unexpectedly ill. She flew to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and underwent 13 surgeries, including the removal of her appendix and a benign tumor, all connected to an arterial aneurysm.

Comatose. Life support.

Several weeks later, still groggy from the medical procedures, White Plume returned home to find a South Dakota state health official testing her water supply. Her illness, the official confirmed, required this sort of testing.

“So apparently someone, somewhere thought the illness that I had was triggered by something environmentally contaminating me,” she says.

Meanwhile, three of her grandchildren were having unexplained seizures. Other young women were giving birth to infants with Down syndrome. Babies with shortened um-

bilical cords. Sudden infant death syndrome. Everything seemed out of proportion.

The moccasin telegraph was buzzing.

“Our teachings tell us that when millions of buffalo are running – that motion made the water move in the aquifers,” White Plume says between puffs. “These natural ways of keeping the water good are no longer available to us.”

Today, key water supplies dotting the Pine Ridge Reservation carry arsenic, alpha radiation and other contaminant levels up to 18 times the legal limit, according to water tests conducted by Energy Laboratories Inc., an independent, Environmental Protection Agency-certified analytical laboratory in Rapid City, S.D. In June and July 2009, 58 percent of the private wells, springs and soils tested on Pine Ridge showed positive results for contamination by arsenic, lead and/or various forms of radiation.

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**BACK BEFORE  
THE TIME OF  
RESERVATIONS,**

the Lakota could scan for enemies or game from the top of the Badlands wall. The site of the Wounded Knee Massacre lies just a few miles southwest of the Badlands National Park. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*

“Some people who drink water containing alpha emitters in excess of EPA’s standard over many years may have an increased risk of getting cancer,” states the EPA Web site.

Though the origins remain unknown, the recognition of such amplified contaminant levels and potential health risks has encouraged investigation by many parties both inside and beyond the reservation.

“Without water there is no life,” White Plume says slowly, the smoke streaming through her curled lips. “Contamination will affect us and our future generations as well.”

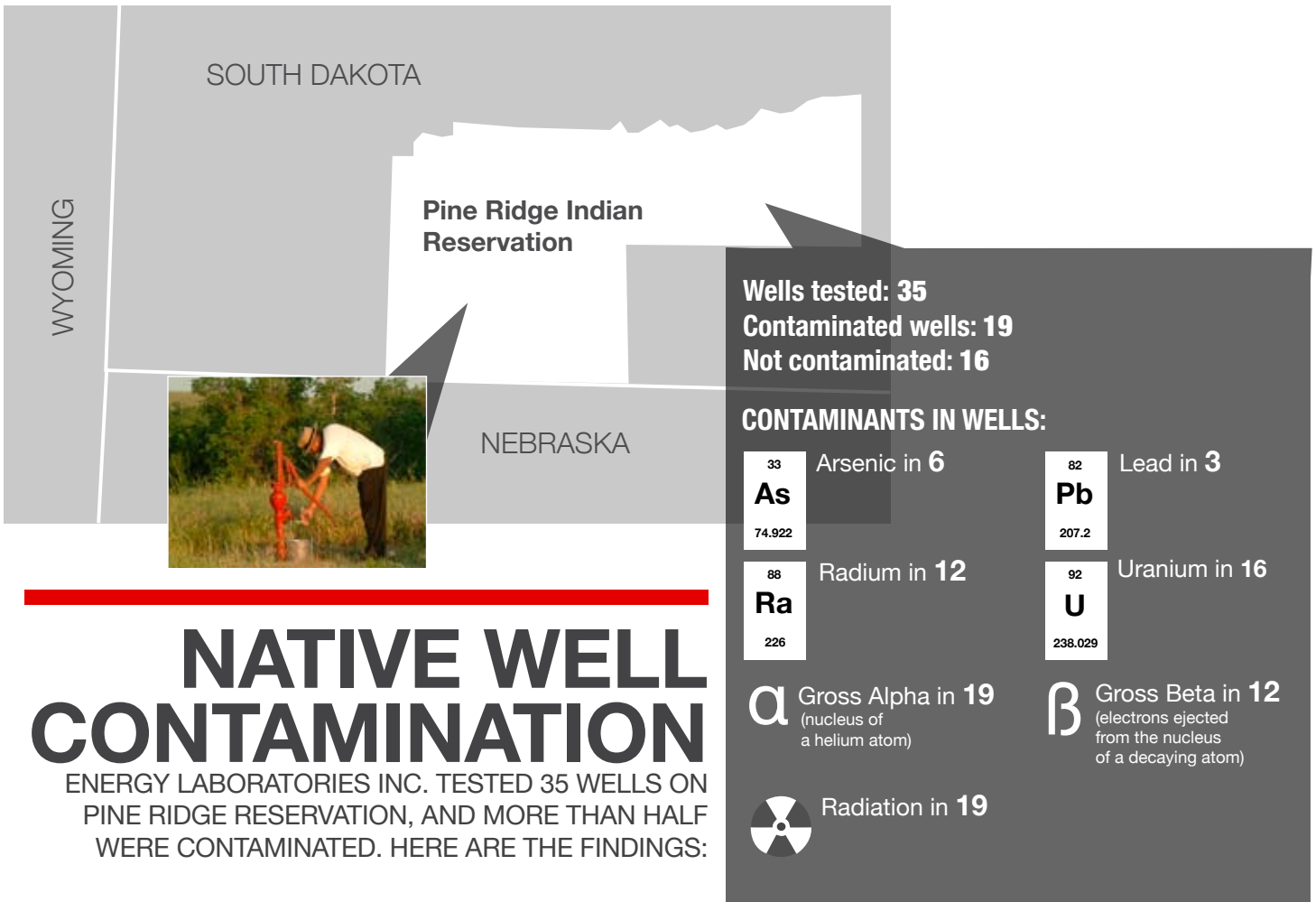
Polluted drinking water on Pine Ridge is just one of many environmental hazards currently plaguing Native lands and tribes today. In the United States, 317 reservations “are threatened by environmental hazards, ranging from toxic wastes to clear cuts,” according to the Worldwatch Institute, an independent research organization known for its

fact-based analysis of critical global issues. Clear-cutting is a controversial logging practice that removes all trees – both young and old – from a harvest area.

Surrounded by a consumer-driven society, many Native tribes still struggle to maintain their traditional ecological beliefs. Despite contamination, the Oglala Lakota still give newborns a drop of water as their first medicine. Despite pressure for genetic modification, the Anishinaabeg in Minnesota still harvest native rice. And the Onondagas in New York, like most other tribes, begin every ceremony with thanksgiving to the earth. While these tribes battle corporate encroachment, the effort to ensure a healthy environment for future generations is gaining momentum. And more often than not, Native women are leading the change, confronting an array of significant environmental issues that impact many tribal lands.







SOURCE AND PHOTO: ENERGY LABORATORIES INC., RAPID CITY, S.D.  
 GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

# NATIVE WELL CONTAMINATION

ENERGY LABORATORIES INC. TESTED 35 WELLS ON PINE RIDGE RESERVATION, AND MORE THAN HALF WERE CONTAMINATED. HERE ARE THE FINDINGS:

**Those issues include:**

- Corporate encroachment that threatens both the environment and the traditional native stewardship of the land
- An often-compartmentalized American mindset unacquainted with the traditional Native synthesis of environment and all other aspects of Native culture

**“THERE’S NOTHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN WATER. POTABLE, DRINKABLE. CLEAR, PRISTINE WATER. THAT’S OUR FIGHT AND IT’S GOING TO GO ON AND ON.”**

-TOM COOK  
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
 ALIGNING FOR RESPONSIBLE MINING

• Development of renewable energy on tribal lands to provide a healthy future for those who have yet to come

“While Native peoples have been massacred and fought, cheated and robbed of their

historical lands, today their lands are subject to some of the most invasive industrial interventions imaginable,” said Winona LaDuke, an Anishinaabeg Indian and Harvard-educated environmental activist who is trying to reform Minnesota’s White Earth Indian Reservation with a sustainable, green economy.

## Contamination, from start to finish

Unlike their ancestors, the Oglala Lakota are now in a pitched battle for clean water. The Crow Butte Resources uranium mining operation lies 30 miles southwest of the reservation border, just outside Crawford, Neb. White Plume, the Oglala Sioux tribal government and other Native and non-Native groups, including Aligning for Responsible Mining and the Western Nebraska Resources Council, believe the mining operation is contaminating the reservation water supply through spills and leakage.

“We don’t think they have a viable way to mine uranium that doesn’t toxicate the environment,” says Tom Cook, 61, executive director of ARM, one of the organizations hosting the legal fight against Cameco Inc., owner of Crow Butte Resources.

“If something can go wrong, it probably will,” Cook predicts. “There’s going to be a deep freeze. Wells will crack. There’s going to be some guy who didn’t put the glue on right to join two PVC plastics. There’s going to be a crack in the coupling and it’s going to emit this shit down the river and contaminate it forever. And for what? For some fuck-up?”

“There are two overriding laws involved, which they cannot escape from: One is the law of gravity, and the

other is Murphy's Law that something is going to go wrong."

Consequently, a number of groups have filed suit against the mining company's current plans for expansion. Petitioners in the case against Crow Butte include the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Western Nebraska Resources Council, Black Hills Sioux Nation Treaty Council, Debra White Plume and Owe Aku, a Lakota cultural preservation organization. They allege Pine Ridge water tests show maximum contaminant levels – arsenic being the major concern – far above the legal limit. Results from a January 2008 test show gross alpha levels in the Mini Wiconi pipeline, which serves the western ranges of the reservation, at 45.9 picocuries per liter. The maximum permissible level in the United States for gross alpha, a type of radiation, is 15, according to the EPA. At nearly three times the permissible level of gross alpha, those who drink regularly from the pipeline have an increased risk of developing cancer.

While recognizing these statistics, Cameco representatives deny any relationship between Crow Butte operations and groundwater contamination on the reservation. They cite water tests taken before the uranium mining began and also upstream from the operations, both showing concentrated levels of uranium. In addition to a number of geographic, hydrologic and geologic factors, these tests rule out any association between Crow Butte operations and contaminated drinking water in Pine Ridge, Cameco says.

"Due to the geology of the area and the distance, it's not physically possible," said Ken Vaughn, senior communications specialist for Crow Butte. "We're not af-

fecting the water."

Yet White Plume blames the swelled contamination levels for her grandchildren's brain seizures. And Cook blames Crow Butte for his brother's diabetes and pancreatic cancer. Both point to a 2008 report released by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health suggesting a correlation between inorganic arsenic exposure and Type 2 diabetes.

Although arsenic contamination was originally admitted by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board as one of five contentions against the Crow Butte expansion, appeals from both Crow Butte Resources and the NRC reversed the allegation. According to the NRC memorandum on groundwater contamination, "Crow Butte ... does not dispute that the release of arsenic into public drinking water would be harmful. Crow Butte maintains that its operations have not and will not release contaminants such as arsenic ..."

Despite the outcome of the current lawsuit, petitioners say they will continue the battle for clean water.

"There's nothing more precious than water. Potable. Drinkable. Clear, pristine water," said Cook, a Mohawk who moved to Pine Ridge from the Akwesasne Reservation in New York in 1973. "That's our fight, and it's going to go on and on."

Katsi Cook, a Mohawk midwife and environmental justice activist on the Akwesasne Reservation, helped create the Akwesasne Mothers' Milk Project. The goal of the project, Cook wrote, "is to understand and characterize how toxic contaminants have moved through the local food chain, including mothers' milk." For 21 years, General Motors Corp. provided those contami-



## EVEN BEFORE THE LAKOTA

**PEOPLE**, the land encompassing the Badlands National Park was used as a hunting ground by paleo-Indians, the very first people to enter and inhabit the continental United States. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*





nants.

The Akwesasne Mohawks face a situation similar to the Lakotas on Pine Ridge. They have been fighting GM since the 1980s in an effort to clean up PCB contamination emitted from GM's nearby factory operations decades earlier.

**“THE PLANT LIFE THAT WAS THERE AND OUR TRADITIONAL MEDICINES ARE GONE. WE’RE HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME PASSING SOME OF THIS KNOWLEDGE DOWN BECAUSE WE’RE UNABLE TO PRACTICE SOME OF IT.”**

—JEANNE SHENANDOAH  
MIDWIFE, ONONDAGA NATION

Chevy Corvair from 1959 to 1980.

“The consumption of fish or wildlife from contaminated areas is of special concern because of the proximity of the Mohawk Tribal lands,” states the National Priority Site fact sheet for GM’s Central Foundry Division, published Dec. 8, 2008,

According to the EPA, the GM facility adjacent to the reservation used polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, in its production of aluminum cylinder heads for the

by the EPA. “Fishing remains restricted by the New York State Department of Health and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. Individuals ingesting fish from the St. Lawrence River or ingesting or coming in contact with contaminated surface water, groundwater, soil sludges or sediments are potentially at risk.”

A 1998 study by the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health shows a link between consumption of contaminated fish, a major part of the Mohawk diet, and increased breast milk PCB concentrations.

“The reduction in breast milk PCB concentrations parallels a corresponding decrease in local fish consumption and may be the result of the advisories that have been issued over the past decade recommending against the consumption of local fish by pregnant and nursing Mohawk women,” states the report, published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

“The fact is that women are the first environment,” Cook says in “All Our Relations.” “We accumulate toxic chemicals like PCBs ... dumped into the waters by various industries. They are stored in our body

## **BEER CANS LITTER**

the ground in Big Elk Park in Macy, Neb. Environmental activist Debra White Plume believes in the concept

of *mitakuye oyasin*, meaning all things are related.

“Everything in our creation is our relative,” White Plume said. “Earth, water, air and all the standing silent nation – we are all related. Part of our spiritual and social and political obligation is to protect our relatives.”

*Photo by Clay Lomneth.*



fat and are excreted primarily through breast milk. What that means is that through our own breast milk, our sacred natural link to our babies, they stand the chance of getting concentrated dosages.”

Just 150 miles southwest from the Akwesasne Reservation lies Onondaga Lake in south-central New York, where the Onondagas believe their chief was persuaded to accept the Great Law of Peace. Today, Onondaga Lake is considered one of the most polluted lakes in the country, according to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. An estimated 165,000 pounds of mercury entered the lake between 1956 and 1970 through the Honeywell Corporation’s chloralkali process, the NYSDEC reports.

“Contamination in Onondaga Lake presents risks to human health that are above USEPA guidelines,” states the NYSDEC’s remedial investigation report for Onondaga Lake. “In addition, the primary sources of cancer risks and non-cancer hazards are due to mercury, PCBs and PCDD/PCDFs as a result of the consumption of Onondaga Lake fish. The finding of elevated risk and hazard estimates for mercury and PCBs is consistent with the fact that concentrations of these chemicals in fish tissues collected from Onondaga Lake exceed U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s action limits.”

The report later concludes that “Almost all lines of evidence indicate that the Honeywell-related contaminants and ionic waste in Onondaga Lake have produced adverse ecological effects at all trophic levels examined.”

Another traditional homebirth midwife, 64-year-old Jeanne Shenandoah of the Onondaga Nation, serves on the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, a delegation of Iroquois representatives committed to preserving their indigenous resources. According to Shenandoah, the physical degradation of the lake has equated to a loss of traditional Onondaga practices.

“Our people historically lived around this lake. They

**“AFTER SEVERAL GENERATIONS IN A WELFARE STATE SYSTEM, ANY POPULATION WOULD DEVELOP BAD HABITS.”**

-LORETTA COOK  
PUBLIC RELATIONS, OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE

took most of their foods from the lake,” she says. “The fishes are no longer there. The plant life that was there and our traditional medicines are gone. We’re having a difficult time passing some of this knowledge down because we’re unable to practice some of it.”

In traditional Lakota culture, the word *wasichu* means “the taker of the fat.” Those Natives who have fought for their human rights to clean air, clean water and clean, healthy land believe greed is largely to blame for the decadence of their once-pristine environment.

“Fat was a prized possession in pre-contact days. It was a limited resource,” White Plume says. “One winter, a *wasichu* took all the fat during a blizzard and left none. It’s this concept of greed, of the self-image being more

important than anything or anyone. When one is a taker of the fat, it throws everything out of balance.”

Yet Native America has a long way to go to clean up its own house. Plastic trash bags bought and used by the Oglala Sioux cling to barbed-wire fences throughout the reservation and Styrofoam cups litter the front yards of many Pine Ridge residencies. Although the surrounding hills make postcard material, the reservation communities often resemble small landfills – a visual nightmare of garbage mounds, tire-filled creeks and flyblown trash.

Loretta Cook, the 62-year-old Oglala Sioux Tribe’s

**“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUR SPIRITUAL WAYS AND NON-NATIVES’ SPIRITUAL WAYS IS THAT WE NEVER PUT IT DOWN.”**

-LORETTA COOK  
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER, OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE

public relations officer, says a history of dispossession by the American government accounts for the extreme poverty on Pine Ridge and is therefore to blame for many Oglala Lakota’s poor environmental habits.

“After several generations in a welfare state system, any population would develop bad habits,” says Cook, who is Tom Cook’s wife of 33 years. “The mix-up of values in everyday Pine Ridge society reflects the onslaught of American society, its institutions, ‘values’ and of course, alcohol.”

## Spirituality, not activism

Many Native lands currently in rebirth are partly the result of painstaking defensive efforts by women like Debra White Plume, Winona LaDuke, Jeanne Shenandoah and others. Although their efforts are considered “environmental activism” in mainstream society, most of these leaders don’t consider themselves either activists or environmentalists.

“I don’t think I made a conscious decision to do it,” Shenandoah says. “It’s just following the beliefs and teachings of my people and the beliefs I hold within myself.”

For many traditional Native people, practicing responsible environmental stewardship is not a conscious decision. Historically, most indigenous cultures view environmentalism and spirituality as one and the same, a reality Natives say they try to reaffirm in U.S. courts.

“These people don’t even think about the spirit of the water or the plants and grasses that grow there,” Shenandoah says. “Or the spirit of the fish. We realize we have to remind these people that they have no kind of spiritual concept in their thinking. It’s very frustrating, very time consuming and tiring.”

Shenandoah’s complaints emphasize what Loretta Cook believes is a cultural discord between Native and non-Native spiritual convictions. Non-Natives, Cook says, tend to use religion for one hour on Sundays.

“The difference between our spiritual ways and non-



## A SUNFLOWER GLOWS

in the sunset at Pine Ridge Reservation. Wildflowers represent the natural beauty endangered by pollution and groundwater contamination. Photo by Clay Lometh.

Natives' spiritual ways is that we never put it (spirituality) down," Cook says. "Some choose to compartmentalize it so that it sits in little boxes, and you take it out as you need it. But you should have it all out in front of you so it's free and out there so you can work with it."

In the Lakota language, *mitakuye oyasin* means "we are all related." For the Lakotas and other Native cultures that believe "we are all related," environmental conservation and the defense of un-sullied Native lands against outside encroachment is also a family obligation.

"Everything in our creation is our relative. Earth, water, air and all the standing silent nation – we are all related," White Plume says. "Part of our spiritual and social and political obligation is to protect our relatives."

### Next: preserving the land

Today, a number of Native tribes, from the Lakota in the Dakotas to the Iroquois Confederacy in New York to the Anishinaabeg in Wisconsin, battle to preserve the environment for those who are yet to come. The next seven generations, the Lakota say, depend upon it.

"Traditionally, we're told that as we live in this world, we have to be careful for the next seven generations," says Loretta Cook. "I don't want my grandkids to be glowing and say, 'We have all these bad things happening to us because you didn't say something about it.'"

Part of this family and spiritual obligation to preserve the environment for future generations has taken the shape of renewable energy efforts and re-localized Native economies.

"If nuclear power is the answer, I don't know what the question was," LaDuke said at a lecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in March 2009. "If you want peace, you need some kind of economy based on justice – not just with the people, but with the natural world."

LaDuke and other environmental activists hope to create that justice, that re-localized economy, through wind and solar energy

on Native reservations. Locally produced, neither wind nor solar power "need to be purchased by Halliburton," LaDuke says. "If you're waiting for the guys in Washington to come up with a plan, you're going to be waiting a long time."

Current efforts on Pine Ridge, "the Saudi Arabia of wind," as White Plume calls it, include both wind power research and Henry Red Cloud's Lakota Solar Enterprises, one of the nation's first 100 percent Native-owned and operated renewable energy companies.

Since 2003, Lakota Solar Enterprises has assembled and installed more than 300 solar heating systems for tribal homes. A direct descendant of Chief Red Cloud, Henry Red Cloud has been recognized as a 2009 Innovative Idea Champion by the Corporation for Enterprise Development.

Meanwhile, the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, under the leadership of Anishinaabeg leaders like LaDuke, is currently a hotbed for Native sustainability efforts. Through the White Earth Land Recovery Project, the reservation hosts not only a 20-kilowatt wind turbine, but also works to support weatherization and alternative heating, especially solar panels, for local homes and housing units. Major efforts also have been taken by the recovery project to make traditional food sources available on the reservation.

"Our people spend a quarter of our money on food at Wal-Mart," LaDuke said. "When you buy from local producers, that money circulates in your community. ... Food prices will keep going up, so we need to keep it local."

### Putting "mother" into Mother Nature

A narrow dirt road leads from the small reservation town of Manderson, S.D., to White Plume's home three miles north. Two vehicles – an old blue van and muddy pickup – sit idle in the unpaved driveway, accumulating dust carried from the long, dry hills surrounding them. Inside, White Plume lights a bundle of sweet grass and stares out the window.

"You know how it feels when your mother holds you in her arms?" she says with a sigh. "The comfort, nourishment, love and peace? That's how I feel about the land." ☺

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Alex White Plume explains how language shows differences in how people view the land around them.



Rose Mesteth admonishes the writer about putting things in "white" terms.



Links to more stories about environmental issues.

# WAITING FOR THEIR SECOND WIND

## RESERVATIONS CONSIDER WIND ENERGY POTENTIAL

STORY BY CARSON VAUGHAN

**N**ative lands have potential to generate more than 22 percent of America's electricity through wind energy alone, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

And residents of South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation – the “Saudi Arabia of wind,” as Lakota environmental activist Debra White Plume calls it – are taking steps to make their share a reality. “It's huge, the wind potential,” said Pat Spears, president of the Intertribal Council on Utility Policy. “We can safely say a fourth of the nation's energy can be met with wind resource development on tribal lands alone. Enron estimates half of this country's electric load could be met by wind. We just have the best of the best, you know, on tribal lands.” Those advocating wind energy development on Pine Ridge have kept a close eye on the 64-kilowatt wind turbine already functioning at the reservation's radio station, KILI-FM. Donated in June 2008 by Honor the Earth, a nonprofit organization that raises and directs funds to Native environmental groups, the KILI wind turbine is still an experiment.

Despite its social buzz, the turbine – originally estimated to cut the radio station's \$1,800 monthly electricity budget by 67 percent – has “had its problems,” according to 61-year-old Tom Casey, KILI-FM's business manager and development director. A blizzard last November froze energy production. Fully functioning by February, the turbine stopped again in June. A crane lowered the turbine and shipped it back to its California origins, where the transmission was fixed once again. Although shipped back to KILI, the turbine has not yet been reinstalled. The control board is now problematic.

“Despite our frustration at getting it up and going, there has definitely been a lot of interest,” Casey said. “A local school has used our anemometer to test wind on their land, and the college, too. ... Once it's fixed we're hoping it'll run for 20 years. Whether it covers two-thirds of our electricity we'll have to see.”

Members of the Oglala Lakota Sioux on Pine Ridge have been researching the reservation's wind energy potential for years. They're now working with local economic development committees and renewable energy experts like Pat Spears to make sense of the studies and bring the process to

fruition.

“One hundred years of servitude and being regulated to death and finally we have among us educated people who recognize that we have all these capabilities in our own rank and file,” said Loretta Cook, public relations director for the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

Studies conducted by the Intertribal COUP and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory show more than 276,000 megawatts of wind energy in the Dakotas on tribal lands alone, according to Spears, a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. The OST is one of only two tribes out of eight, however, to reject plans by the Intertribal COUP to establish a 50-megawatt wind farm on their reservation. Although proposals have been sent through OST committees, a final resolution has never made it to the council floor.

“There are a lot of folks that aren't on the same page and at the level of understanding that it takes to make good, informed decisions,” Spears said. “That's what happens when you have turnover. Every two years there's a new council and it's just part of what we deal with in development of any project on reservations for that matter.”

Although the reservation's grid system can handle only a limited electricity output and the market for its output is relatively small, Spears noted Pine Ridge also has nearby rural energy cooperatives that many other tribes cannot access. These co-ops “might be useful for large land-based tribes with dispersed populations, but perhaps more importantly, it could be tailored for a region where a number of tribes exist, but each tribe individually is too small to consider utility formation by itself,” according to the U.S. Department of Energy Web site.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe is reviewing current offers from a number of wind development groups. Although OST has yet to accept any offers, hope for wind energy lingers.

“The buffalo is in front of us, you know, the buffalo that we used for everything,” Cook said. ☺



**TOM CASEY**, KILI radio announcer, keeps an eye on a basketball game at the Lakota Nation Invitational tournament a season ago. Casey, also KILI's business manager, says the station's use of a wind turbine has had mixed results. *Photo by Seth A. McConnell, Rapid City Journal.*



# BRINGING LIFE TO WORDS

In nearly all of her works, author **Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve** draws inspiration from her personal experiences and cultural background. She writes in a voice that celebrates the past and brings traditional Native values to the present.

Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve's life is not one of numbers, although the numbers are revealing. She's 76. She's been married for 59 years. She has three children, five grandchildren and one great-grandchild. She's written more than 20 books and received many awards— including the National Humanities Medal, given to her by President Clinton in 2000, the first ever given to a South Dakotan.

But numbers alone don't reveal all of her accomplishments. How she rose above the Rosebud Indian Reservation where she was born on Feb. 21, 1933, a place where she never saw anyone writing books or even dreaming about it.

STORY BY SHANNON SMITH  
PHOTOS BY CLAY LOMNETH









How she would travel far away from the Depression, the poverty, the dust-beaten emptiness of a reservation that still holds some of her life's happiest moments. A reservation where she was unaware the rest of the country had plunged into a depression.

"I really wasn't aware that anything was lacking. We didn't have any money anyway, and so it was just the way life was," Sneve said.

She would avoid bathroom stalls marked "Indians only," which she naively thought was a good thing, and ignore the seasonal anthropologists investigating Indians, the ones she and her friends made up wild stories to tell to just because they

stern great-grandmother, Hannah Howe Frazier. Their stories remain in her heart and continue to inspire her. Stories that came to life for her, and later her life would become her stories.

Eventually, her rich heritage translated into multi-cultural appreciation and tolerance themes in her stories. She strives to represent who she is – Lakota, Dakota, Ponca, Scottish, English and French – with accuracy and truth, honoring that identity.

"I cannot be totally a Native American woman when it comes to a blood situation. But that is how I have grown up, as a Native American, so I have always thought of myself first as that," Sneve said.

Her mother is Native and her father an Episcopalian priest. So religion became a strong part of her life – "a family affair." But despite her great-grandmother Hannah's (stern) Christian religion, Virginia also learned about White Buffalo Calf Woman and absorbed Lakota spiritual beliefs.

The rolling balance between ethnic identities is something her children learned too, having a Native mother and Norwegian father, or "Siouxwegians" as Virginia called it. This mingling is reflected in "The Trickster and the Troll," Virginia's book where the Lakota trickster Iktomi meets and befriends a Norwegian troll, and they share a common fate.

Shirley Sneve, Virginia's daughter, executive director at Native American Public Telecommunications in Lincoln, Neb., described her family's diversity this way:

"The holidays for many people is when you take that ethnic identity out of the closet and really do it up, through all the traditional recipes and stuff. That's what always happens at our place. Thanksgiving will be lutefisk and leska and buffalo stew."

Virginia's son, Paul Sneve, an Episcopalian priest in Rapid City, S.D., said the way he was raised in two cultures made him different from both the Santee kids and the white kids in Flaudreau, S.D.

"What I was doing was sort of translating anthropologically, trying to make sense of both cultures," he said. "I was white, I was Indian, so

**"I DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS DIFFERENT THAN ANYBODY ELSE 'TIL I WENT TO COLLEGE. IT WAS A SHOCK. I HAD TO BE AWARE OF THAT IF I WANTED TO STAY THERE."**

– VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE  
NATIVE AUTHOR

would believe anything.

She would go to South Dakota State University and get degrees in English and history, graduating in 1954 as one of only four Native students.

"I didn't realize I was different than anybody else 'til I went to college," Sneve said. "It was a shock. I had to be aware that if I wanted to stay there ... then I would really have to draw on my own personal strength to do that."

### Making sense of both cultures

Her skin is not as dark as it was in college, when she really stood out. And her hair is silver now, bone-straight, falling to her chin. Her hands are weathered and wrinkled, as strong and determined as her will.

But as far as she has come from the reservation, she is never far from the echoes of her grandmother, Flora Clairmont Driving Hawk, or from her



## SNEVE'S WORKS

VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE'S LITERARY MILESTONES: GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ



**1972**

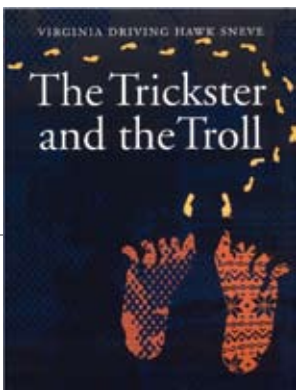
**JIMMY YELLOW HAWK** was Sneve's first published book, after winning an award for the story in 1971.



**COMPLETING THE CIRCLE** is her personal memoir, which won the 2000 North American Indian Prose Award.

**1995**





**1999**

**THE TRICKSTER AND THE TROLL** combines characters from stories in Sneve's and her husband's families.



**LANA'S LAKOTA MOONS** introduces Lakota culture through a multicultural friendship.

**2007**

**VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE** signs her book "Lana's Lakota Moons" after a panel discussion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Sneve credits her mother and teachers with encouraging her writing. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*



I think I had to defend myself or my people one way or another. I became a young anthropologist. I had to, and so did Shirley, and so did my little brother.”

Dr. Norma Wilson, a former professor of Native literature at SDSU, believes that appreciation of many cultures strikes at the literary core of Sneve’s writing.

“I think that she would want to instill in her readers a sense of pride and respect for what is admirable, for what is good, for what is life-giving ... (for) cultural and family tradition. I think that she would want that whether the reader was a Native American or a non-Native American. She is trying to transmit the understanding that as human beings we learn how to live from those (who) live well and responsibly, with consideration for the world around us... and the ability of that world to thrive and go on living.”

One way Sneve instills pride in her stories is by letting her life flow into the stories. In 1972, she published her first book, “Jimmy Yellow Hawk,” partly inspired by her brother, which garnered recognition when it won the Native American writers category in the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) contest in 1971. “Grandpa was a cowboy and an Indian,” was partly based on her grandfather.

Virginia learned to write “as a natural extension” of hearing stories so often. Her teachers encouraged her when they recognized

her ability, and her mother encouraged her to keep writing.

Paul said the stories are valuable to him because he saw a completely different side of his family.

“I don’t ever remember her telling me (traditional) stories because we were hearing them from other people, mostly family,” Paul said. “But she would tell us stories about our family ... they had full and very rich lives, and that our family had a lot of good stories.”

Sneve spent 25 years as an English teacher and high school counselor in South Dakota, all the while laboring away at manuscripts, staring down rejection after rejection.

“That is what I decided I wanted to do, so I wasn’t going to let a few rejection slips slow me down,” she said. Perseverance and family encouragement kept her writing, although her kids didn’t know until they were older exactly what she was doing, plugging away at a typewriter all the time.

“It was a secret. I had no idea she was doing this stuff,” Shirley said.

Wilson believes Sneve’s role as a teacher contributed to her writings as motivation and research.

“She wasn’t just holed up somewhere writing, she worked with children,” Wilson said. “She knew what kinds of home situations they had, what kind of difficulties they experienced as Native

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**RIGHT: FOUR GENERATIONS**

of women in Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve’s family on her mother’s side pose in 1953.

From left; Virginia Driving Hawk, great-grandmother Hannah Howe Frazier, grandmother Harriet Frazier Ross and mother Rose Ross Driving Hawk. *Courtesy of Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve.*



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**VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE**

at ages 1 (far left) and 9 (left).

*Courtesy of Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve.*



**VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE** holds her great grandson in April 2010. *Courtesy of Shirley Sneve.*

American children growing up in American society, which often didn't do much to validate their Native tradition or to involve them at all, she understood that."

When she saw her daughter reading Laura Ingalls Wilder and that the only reference to Native people was stereotypical and false, she pushed harder to publish literature that would be positive and true for Native people. She still has to work against the generalized and outdated impressions of Native Americans, even with her success as an author.

"I have difficulty getting contemporary stories of Native Americans published because publishers think that their readers still want Indians riding horses, hunting buffalo and living in tipis," Sneve said. "So when you write a contemporary story, particularly if you are writing about problems on the reservation with the alcohol and the drugs ... They don't want to read that about Indians. That's disillusionment, you know. They still want us to be princesses."

Sneve first heard of the injustices the United States inflicted on Native people from a Japanese-American student teacher at the Saint Mary's School for Indian Girls, where she graduated in 1950. The student teacher talked about the internment camps her family was forced into during World War II. The entire class of Native girls was shocked that the government would treat people like that - displacing them and abusing them. Ironically, the student teacher was shocked at their reaction and had to

explain to them the longstanding government policy toward Native Americans.

As far as she has come, she says she can't afford to feel complacent because there is too much yet to do. She wants to publish modern stories of life on the Rez. She is still plugging away at her writing with the same humility she had before being published - only now she is internationally renowned.

"(Her fame) is sort of strange ... She's the same person," Paul said. "She's always been very intelligent, very articulate. That's who raised us, and I think she taught us to be that way too. Yeah, the work that she did was important and wonderful and great, but she is still just mom to us."

Her mother's perseverance is what Shirley says emboldened her to pursue her own career and for Paul to have a broader impact as a priest serving a largely Lakota community just outside of the reservation.

"(Her success) has given us permission to make our own way, to try to broaden horizons, to try to push limits," Paul said. "We all do what we can; it just kind of comes with being in the family."

Because of her, young girls growing up on the Rosebud Indian Reservation today know they can write books, they can be published, they can be strong and persevere and achieve their dreams. In a sense, her life has come full circle. Now the only number that matters is one, whether it is one non-Native adult who sees a new perspective or the one Native child who reads her stories and has hope for the future. ☺

## Q&A

BIOGRAPHY: VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE

**What power do you feel you have to change stereotypes about Native people?**

That is very definitely one of my purposes as a writer, to dispel the stereotypes. And to write as accurately as I can about the Native American experiences and life as I have known it and lived it.

**What have you learned through writing so many books?**

I've honed my skills ... I've become a better writer because I have done so much of it ... It becomes a little bit easier. But I can't become complacent, and I still think that there is room for improvement in the way I do things.

**How has your ethnic identity influenced you?**

I think that has probably influenced me because I am such a conglomeration of different ethnic groups, that I have drawn from all of them into my writing. And I realized that none of us, particularly in the United States, are just one thing anymore. We are all blended. We draw from a rich background, everyone does.

**ON THE WEB**  
nativedaughters.org



Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve talks about the lack of generational support and impact in our society.



Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve defines herself as more than just a writer.



Links to more photos and numbers about storytellers.





# ONCE UPON THEIR TIME

Storytellers carry lessons across generational lines. The women who tell these stories preserve traditional customs while addressing the issues of today.

*"I am from the Buffalo People," the beautiful woman dressed in white said. The woman was as a bright light to the two men who found her on the path. "They sent me to talk to your people. I want you to tell them that I will come to see them."*

Lakota and English words rise above the flames of burning sage, intertwining with the slow currents of smoke to join the stars above. The smoke stings the eyes of storyteller and author Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve as an eager young girl listening to her grandmother tell the story of Lakota culture. The words fuel the flames within the girl; the words bring her to a place before isolation on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The story made an impact on Sneve, and she would later write her grandmother's vision into her book, "Completing the Circle."

**STORY BY SHANNON SMITH  
PHOTOS BY CLAY LOMNETH**

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**TINA MERDANIAN,**

director of public relations for Red Cloud High School, gives a tour at Holy Rosary Mission Church in Pine Ridge, S.D. The church featured a marriage of Lakota traditions and Christian spirituality, even featuring art depicting a Native Jesus and members of the Crow tribe as Romans. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*





As she spoke, one of the men had bad thoughts. He didn't pay attention to her words, he tried to grab her. The other man, who had good thoughts, warned him, "Don't!" It was too late. There was a crash of thunder, and a big cloud came over the bad man and the girl. When it cleared away, the bad man was a skeleton and ash on the ground. Ever after the White Buffalo Calf Woman protects girls from bad men.

The silence between the words of the story envelops the children, stirring their souls as they sit around their elder. Their fathers are away from the village hunting for dinner, their mothers are preparing the tipis, their grandmothers are writing history into the air and into minds as their words call out to the children. Words of meaning, words of instruction, stories showing where people come from, how they are, what they should be.

The other young man was afraid, but the woman told him that because he did not have bad thoughts, he would be all right. So he went back to his village and told his people to be ready.

Then she came, walking from the east with the sunrise, all dressed in white and so beautiful. In her hands, she carried a bundle with a pipe in it. She said that she was the people's sister and that she had brought them a sacred pipe. She taught the people how to use the pipe in seven sacred ceremonies and for healing and peace, not war.

She talked to the women. "My sisters," she called them, "you have hard things to do in your life ... But you are important because without you there would be no people."

These words echo in Philomine Lakota's classroom at Red Cloud High School on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The high school students listen as she tells of the core values given by White Buffalo Calf Woman. The students are learning Lakota words, the words their parents were forced to forget.

Storytelling is a diverse and powerful medium of imagery and description, and continues to provide the foundation of understanding Native culture through the diffusion of ideas and history through themes, as well as give guidance to the role of women as protectors of culture and values.

Although both men and women could be storytellers, grandmothers were often the main source of this learning due to the distribution of roles within the tribe.



**PHILOMINE LAKOTA** Philomine Lakota teaches Lakota language classes at Red Cloud High School in Pine Ridge, S.D. "I have a big fear that a lot of these ceremonies will be forgotten," she said. "We have too much competition with the modern world." *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*



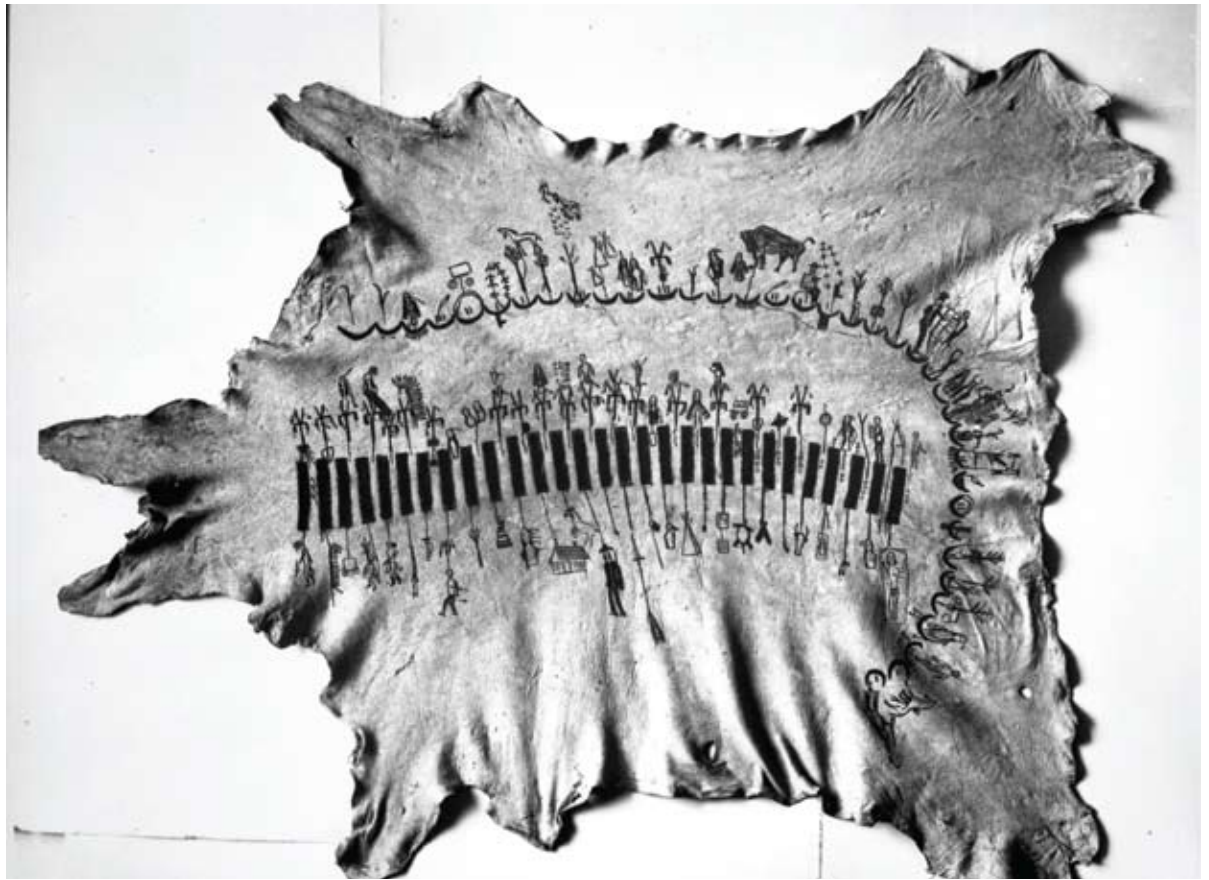
**“A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK THAT US WOMEN ARE NOT LEADERS, BUT WE ARE THE HEART OF THE NATION. WE ARE THE CENTER OF OUR HOME, AND IT IS US WHO DECIDE HOW IT WILL BE.”**

– PHILOMINE LAKOTA, LAKOTA LANGUAGE TEACHER



## WINTER COUNTS

are calendars in which years are recorded by pictures that represent an event the year was named for. The records, which are called *waniyeteu wowapi* in Lakota, were used as a part of an oral history. *Historical Society.*



When the adult men would go to hunt, women were in charge of the children, and grandmothers would often tell the stories, which allowed the mothers to work on the tasks that required younger, stronger hands. The elders would educate the children about core values to maintain order and to encourage safety from an early age, ensuring that the children knew how to critically analyze dangerous situations and connect with the culture's spiritual essence.

The storyteller would pass down religious motifs and origin stories, building pride and understanding in children. This central power to shape and form the minds of the youth gave women an influential voice.

Stories have many uses, often intertwining, from the use of educating values and serving as history books, to the preservation of culture and the soul. Stories both explain life and become life by serving many roles in society.

### The purposes of storytelling:

- History stories document and illuminate the physical past while creation stories establish origin of life and values
- Education stories teach etiquette, lessons and morals
- Healing stories make an impact on the wounds caused by the past or present and seek to make a positive return back to strength, faith, tradition and family. The act of storytelling is also healing itself by giving a voice to the lost and silent
- Humor stories entertain and captivate audiences but also are a coping mechanism
- Stories reflect the cycle of life and the resilience of the Native way

Storytelling is both the key and the door to another time, people and culture. For cultures with no written language until post-contact, stories illustrated the lives and values of Native peoples. The stories provide perspective on life in America before contact, and stories

reflect the dramatic changes to life after outside influence. Storytelling's role in piecing together the past is important, but also, modern storytelling's continued importance in Native culture shows the significance of changes to values, daily life and perspective.

Storytelling is writing the past, living the present and preserving the future. As storytelling undergoes radical changes due to the diaspora of Native people from the tribal community, the future generation holds the power to progress storytelling, but new and familiar challenges simultaneously threaten to extinguish the traditional form.

"I have a big fear that a lot of these ceremonies will be forgotten, we have too much competition with the modern world," Philomine Lakota said.

## Creation and history

Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, a Sicangu Lakota author, knew her grandmother Flora believed in the creation stories of their ancestors. The words and essence of the story flowed in Flora's blood, and in Virginia, and connected them both to the past and future.

"Flora told these stories because they were part of her heritage. She didn't know that they were called legends or that they sprang from a people's need to understand, explain and accept the nature of humankind or the supernatural," Sneve wrote in her personal memoir, "Completing the Circle."

Creation stories established the point of origin for Native peoples, often indicating a sacred place where life began and emphasizing a communal bond with nature and the land. Each tribe has a different creation story, ranging from tribes emerging directly out of the earth to the divine breathing life into medicine bundles.

Women were seen as keepers of the faith due to their responsibility and recollection within the oral tradition,

but they were also featured in many creation myths as the life-giving deity.

Many examples of goddesses can be found in Native cultures: Hard Being Woman, who breathed life into the man and woman who would become the Hopi tribe; the Laguna Yellow Woman; Coyote Woman; Grandmother Spider or Spider Old Woman; Thought Woman; Iyatiku; Earth Woman; Corn Woman; and the Lakota White Buffalo Calf Woman.

The women in these stories are more than fertility goddesses and mothers, acting more as foundation figures for the tribe.

Philomine Lakota, Hohwoju, Itazipacola and Oglala Sioux Lakota, teaches the Lakota language at Red Cloud High School on Pine Ridge.

According to Philomine Lakota, the Lakota word for the tree of life is also used to refer to women. The word for the principal male translates to “the mouth of the tree of life.”

In other words, the male was intended to be the mouth of the woman, not to control her, and Philomine Lakota says that is one thing that has been lost in the culture.

“A lot of people think that us women are not leaders, but we are the heart of the nation. We are the center of our home, and it is us who decide how it will be,” Lakota said.

“We have yet to relearn that.”

The oral tradition is also how history was passed down through generations. With a written language developing later, words and memories were the best ways to transmit information. Some art told narratives through patterns of knots, some records were kept, such as winter counts, but the majority of Native history was contained in the words of elders to children.

Accounts of battles, displacement and families were remembered through the oral tradition.

Modern storytellers, such as Stella Long, Choctaw, don't always focus on the past, however. Long was named contemporary storyteller of 2002 by the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. Native culture focuses on the preservation of culture for future generations, which includes the long past and the current reality.

“I don't always dig into the past because stories are out there now. And someday, what I tell will be history,” Long said. “That's what a man told me one time: ‘Your stories are important. It's stories of today, but 20 years from now it's going to be history and people will be wanting to hear it.’”

## Healing

Storytelling doesn't heal a broken bone or sooth a cough; but it does hold the power to mend the spirit, strengthen and empower.

Difficulties plagued the Native experience throughout history. Most of the obstacles and afflictions have been caused by the Anglo-Europeans through bad or ignored treaties, relocations, disease, famine and purposeful destruction of language and culture. All of these have weakened the fragile web of Native identity, but storytelling, the backbone of tradition, has prevented some of the damage.

The suffering led to high rates of depression, alcoholism and suicide among Native people, which has created a need for another kind of story. The healing story seeks to connect people through experience and thought, to facilitate a mending of hearts, minds and culture, to recover what has been lost and gain strength through unity.

When Long ends her stories, she uses Choctaw heal-

ing songs to facilitate the mending process.

“At this stage of my life,” Long said, “I have no regrets for living the emotional hardships – for I have gained wisdom and perspective from those years. Therefore, I tell my healing stories to support people to find their own way to healing physically, emotionally and spiritually.”

Long first realized her role as a storyteller as a young girl in the tuberculosis clinics of the '50s. Her father died of TB when she was very young, and she was terrified of death. She was removed from her family and sent to one of these clinics. One day, a man who was dying sent for her, saying he had heard she knew things and was special.

She was reluctant but eventually came to him. On his deathbed, she began to talk and let the words flow from her to him. Her words created a bond between the two of them, and he felt at peace. And through her interaction with him, she overcame her fear of death and the grief she carried over her father.

Long said she looks at the hard times as opportunities for growth.

“We can make that as learning or we can stay back there and regret forever what has happened to us,” Long said.

## Humor

The most unique aspect of Native storytelling is the use of humor as entertainment, a learning tool and a survival technique. The trickster character appears in most Native tribes. In Lakota, the trickster figure is Iktomi, also “Spider Man,” who takes many forms.

“Tricksters lie and cheat and are often selfish gluttons. They exaggerate and boast of how they get the best of lesser creatures – including humans. They never accept responsibility for their actions but always get their comeuppance. Yet tricksters never learn from their misadventures,” Sneve said in her book, “The Trickster and the Troll.”

Trickster stories are often used as cautionary tales about disobedience and not listening to elders. Children learn what happens when they misbehave by laughing at the trickster's exploits.

But humor is more pervasive than just a learning tool for young children. Famous authors such as Louise Erdrich have spoken on the necessity of humor for survival, saying humor is one of the most important parts of Native life and literature.

**“I DON'T ALWAYS DIG INTO THE PAST BECAUSE STORIES ARE OUT THERE NOW. AND SOMEDAY, WHAT I TELL WILL BE HISTORY.”**

– STELLA LONG  
CHOCTAW STORYTELLER

“Indian people really have a great sense of humor, and when it's survival humor, you learn to laugh at things ... It's just a personal way of responding to the world and to things that happen to you,” Erdrich said in an interview from “Winged Words” by Laura Coltelli.

The survival mechanism also offers an identity beyond the stereotype. Humor contradicts and provides insight “very different from the stereotype — the stoic, unflinching Indian standing, looking at the sunset.”

In earlier stories, humor was more obvious, as with the trickster characters. According to Paula Gunn Allen, humor in contemporary stories is bitterer. “It's al-



"MY MOTHER TOLD ME STORIES ALL THE TIME, THOUGH I OFTEN DID NOT RECOGNIZE THEM AS THAT ... AND IN ALL THOSE STORIES, SHE TOLD ME WHO I WAS, WHO I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE, WHOM I CAME FROM AND WHO WOULD FOLLOW ME. IN THIS WAY SHE TAUGHT ME THE MEANING OF THE WORDS SHE SAID, THAT ALL LIFE IS A CIRCLE AND EVERYTHING HAS A PLACE WITHIN IT."

-PAULA GUNN ALLEN  
"THE SACRED HOOP:  
RECOVERING THE FEMININE IN  
AMERICAN INDIAN TRADITIONS"

# THEIR WORDS

FAMOUS WOMEN STORYTELLERS  
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE:

"...IF WE, AS INDIAN PEOPLE, INDIAN WOMEN, KEEP SILENT, THEN WE WILL DISAPPEAR, AT LEAST IN THIS LEVEL OF REALITY."

-JOY HARJO  
INTERVIEW IN "WINGED WORDS"

"IT IS STORY, REALLY, THAT FINDS ITS WAY INTO LANGUAGE, AND STORY IS AT THE VERY CRUX OF HEALING, AT THE HEART OF EVERY CEREMONY AND RITUAL IN THE OLDER AMERICA."

-LINDA HOGAN  
"DWELLINGS"

"AS WE ALWAYS LIKE TO SAY, THE WOMEN ARE TOUGHER AND ROUGHER AND LIVE LONGER, SO CHANCES ARE WE'LL LIVE TO TELL OUR VERSION LAST..."

-LESLIE MARMON SILKO  
INTERVIEW IN "WINGED WORDS"

most gallows humor ... When you've gone through 500 years of genocidal experiences when you know that the other world that surrounds you wants your death and that's all it wants, you get bitter," Allen said in an interview from "Winged Words" by Laura Coltelli.

## Education

From the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman delivering the instructions for living to her people to the cautionary trickster, stories provided structure for everyday life.

As soon as girls were old enough to retain and understand information, the less tangible lessons of morals, ideals and ethics were taught through stories. According to Carolyn Niethammer's "Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women," girls were instilled with knowledge on how to build the home, gather food, create art, as well as how to act and function along with the tribe's standards.

Storytelling was often told alongside daily chores in the home in a casual and constant way.

Modern education through storytelling serves a different purpose. Many living on and off the reservations do not have access to a storyteller outside the sessions the reservation schools sometimes provide. Books of myths are available, but Sneve highlights the importance of the human voice as something that can never be duplicated with written word.

Sneve blames the mobility of society for the transition into nuclear families.

"We don't have the mixture of generations that we used to at all," Sneve said.

Many Native children first learn their heritage and language in the classroom rather than in the home. This is largely due to the generational gap created by the forced boarding schools, which were intended to eliminate "the Native problem" by stripping Native people of their culture, traditions and language.

"They wanted us to be like other people, like themselves in a way, forget our culture," Long said.

In the classroom of Red Cloud High School, Philomine Lakota tries to incorporate as much of the culture and language in her classes as possible - from teaching students the times of day to be thankful and to pray, to their beginnings.

"I talk to them about our origin stories, where we come from, the Black Hills," she said.

Lakota says her students are very enthusiastic and curious, asking many questions like where the name of their tribe, Oglala Sioux, comes from. She told them the version she was told as a girl, where a man was telling another man who he was, so he picked up the earth and poured it on himself. The word Oglala means "pour on self," so the man did this "to say that I come from the earth and that's who I am and that's where I will go back to."

One of Philomine's biggest fears is the culture being lost and that bringing the culture into the schools will not be enough to save it.

"I am worried that we don't have enough time to save our language. It saddens me to know that nobody may not grow up the way I did, Lakota everywhere.

"That is a fear I have, but I have hope... We have to start one word at a time," Lakota said. "I hear (students) using the words more and more, and that's where my hope lies."

**"SOMETIMES I GET TIRED OF THE SORT OF IDEALISM, THE ROMANTIC NOTION OF NATIVE AMERICA, WHEN I KNOW THESE REAL PEOPLE. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU COULD SEPARATE THE RESERVATION FROM THESE (STUDENTS) ... THEY ARE STRUGGLING WITH THE INCREDIBLY POSITIVE SIDE OF THAT, AND WITH THE INCREDIBLY NEGATIVE SIDE OF THAT. AND IT'S REAL FOR THEM."**

- JAMIE LEE, ENGLISH PROFESSOR

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Tina Merdarian gets choked up talking about her grandmother raising her and seeing the looks and whispers of others.



Philomine Lakota talks about how the Lakota regard the woman's role as the heart of the nation.



Links to more photos and numbers about storytelling issues.

## Continuation, power to remain

Women's responsibility to continue the culture and sacred ways occurs in many Native cultures. The woman holds the past, present and future in her hands through her knowledge, compassion and strength. Despite repeated attempts at annihilation, Native people remain. Tenacity and fortitude have made them survivors.

Storytelling is a way to further the continuation of life in modern society.

"I think that as women we are making a great contribution to restoring the protocols that were in place before the acculturation happened," Philomine Lakota said. "That is, that women are sacred. They are lifegivers."

The power of stories to endure time mirrors the power of people to persevere.

Jamie Lee teaches English at the Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation. She requires her students, ranging from 20-year-old high school graduates to 40-year-old dropouts, to write stories about their experiences. In the process, the students have shown her how the harsh history and experiences of Native people shaped them as individuals and the importance of their voices to counter the views of mainstream America.

"Sometimes I get tired of the sort of idealism, the romantic notion of Native America, when I know these real people," Lee said. "I don't know if you could separate the reservation from these (students) ... They are struggling with the incredibly positive side of that and with the incredibly negative side of that. And it's real for them."

The ways that both the methods of storytelling and the stories have changed reflects the circular, opposed to linear, path that most stories follow. The cycle of life is key to most Native beliefs and is a way of looking at life from an anachronous and fluid perspective, where things come full circle and eventually work out.

Tina Merdanian, director of public relations at Red Cloud High School, believes modern storytelling has changed the format, but not the message of storytelling, and still maintains the essence of what those stories are meant to reflect

"Storytelling of today ... is still sharing that same common goal, that same common mission, (only) you may be throwing in statistics, you may be throwing in a lot of information," Merdanian said.

"But you are still telling the same story. It's just fitting today's audience and how you do that is based upon your creativity."

Filmmaker and actress Valerie Red-Horse, Cherokee and Sioux, said, "Storytelling ... is engaging the eye, ear and the soul." Her form of storytelling is art, through film, but the essence of storytelling remains the same. Its power to change, influence and create understanding activates all the senses and emotions.

Storytelling continues to survive extinction through film, novels, schools and generational contact.

And the stories will go on. The stories endure. ☺

## A CLOSER LOOK

# WHITE BUFFALO CALF WOMAN

## THE SACRED LAKOTA FIGURE HAS EVOLVED OVER TIME, BUT SHE HASN'T GONE AWAY.

STORY BY SHANNON SMITH

**H**er name is Ptesan Winyan. She brought the sacred pipe. She brought meaning, essence, life, spirituality. She brought hope. To Philomine Lakota, language teacher at Red Cloud High School on Pine Ridge, White Buffalo Calf Woman is more than just a story. White Buffalo Calf Woman's actions and words serve as a blueprint for how Pine Ridge Lakotas should live.

When Debra Whiteplume, an environmentalist, mentions White Buffalo Calf Woman, she quickly rises to find sage to burn.

Theresa Two Bulls, president of the Oglala Sioux tribe, has a passage of White Buffalo Calf Woman's wisdom on the walls of her office, reminding that "When one sits in the Hoop of the People, one must be responsible, because all of Creation is related, and the hurt of one is the hurt of all, and the honor of one is the honor of all."

For many Lakota women, the story represents the solidarity of the culture as its foundation point, but also shows the fluidity of storytelling itself.

No definitive version of the story exists. One should never be defined. The story shifts and shapes itself to the people, it grows and adapts. Through the oral tradition, it was handed down, and the story changed over time and will continue to change. What most versions agree upon though, is that White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the canunpa wakan, the Sacred Pipe. She also brought the sun dance, the inipi (sweat lodge) and the hanblecia (the vision quest), among other rituals.

In "The Sacred Pipe," Black Elk lists seven rites given by White Buffalo Calf Woman for proper living. University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor Tom Gannon believes the Lakota practiced more ceremonies originally, but after contact with European settlers, only seven were highlighted to better transition Lakota spiritual belief into the Catholic seven sacraments.

In Standing Bear's "Land of the Spotted Eagle," White Buffalo Calf Woman is even referred to as "Holy Woman" and delivers a version of the Ten Commandments, Gannon said in his research on Ptesan Winyan.

The Catholic connection runs throughout the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman, down to her words to return to the people. Some parallel this to the second coming of Christ as the Messiah.

These Christian influences on the myth are part of the history of change within the story. Some of the newest adaptations to the myth create a 'pan-Indian' respect for women, spreading the legend across all Native cultures -- even those that didn't share the myth originally.

In addition to the rituals, White Buffalo Calf Woman's actions inspired many cultural distinctions between men and women including gendered language, women's postures and roles, as well as general guidelines like the placement of the doors in a tipi.

The four sacred colors of the Lakota -- red, white, black and yellow -- can also be traced to the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman. After giving the Lakota people those sacred instructions for living, the woman turned into a calf as she walked away from the tribe. Each time she laid down to rest, the calf was a different color, and these colors would make the sacred hoop for the Lakota.

"Besides the buffalo 'alliance' that she brings, she also gives to the Lakota," Gannon said. "Probably at a time of great cultural peril, a crucial centering, symbolized not only in this holistic number four, but realized in the various rituals of cultural healing and social integration that she's taught them." ☺



# REWINDING HER STORY

Susan La Flesche was born in a tipi during a tumultuous time in 1865, an era when Native Americans were struggling to hold onto any shred of their traditional ways of living.

Yet Susan lived her life in a mostly westernized way. She went to boarding school and college, and she died after owning property and having a robust career as the first female Native doctor in the nation.

Susan's father, Joseph La Flesche, or Iron Eye to his people, was chief of the Omaha Nation. When white settlers came to present-day Nebraska, Iron Eye knew his people's ways way of life was going to change forever. He stressed education and assimilation to his tribe and his family.

"It matters not where one looks, now one sees white people," Iron Eye wrote. "His (the Indian's) only chance is to become as the white man."

STORY BY **JORDAN PASCALE**



In 1889, **Susan La Flesche Picotte** became the first female Native doctor in the United States. Though her story might be long forgotten, her life's work lives on.



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**DR. SUSAN LA  
FLESCHÉ PICOTTE**

helped build this hospital, which was the first hospital on a reservation not funded by government money. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*



Susan became a cultural broker between the white world and the Omaha tribe through her work as a tribal activist, a missionary and most importantly, the reservation doctor.

“She had a foot in each world,” said Dennis Farley, great-nephew of Picotte. “She followed some traditional ways, and she fit in with the Euro-American elite, too. She floated between the two worlds. It must’ve been a confusing, tough role for Susan.”

Susan’s legacy is apparent on the Omaha Reservation: Her turn-of-the-century jade clapboard home and her white hospital still stand in Walthill, Neb., but her story remains largely untold.

Ask a random slew of Walthill reservation high school students about Susan, and they’ll stare with blank faces. Few will even recognize her name.

“We need streets named after her, we need her life to be taught in schools, we need her attitude about education and helping people to permeate throughout this reservation,” said Vida Stabler, the woman who lives in Picotte’s former home. “She could be a

role model to our young people, but no one knows her ... her story.”

**“SHE HAD A FOOT IN EACH WORLD. SHE FOLLOWED SOME TRADITIONAL WAYS, AND SHE FIT IN WITH THE EURO-AMERICAN ELITE, TOO.”**

— DENNIS FARLEY  
PICOTTE’S GREAT-NEPHEW

## A foundation for greatness

On New Year’s Day in 1887, Susan peered through Philadelphia department stores, awed by the lavish dresses and luxurious displays. She was fitted for a dress and wrote home to her sister Rosalie about her experiences.

“I’ve become a lady of fashion,” she wrote.

But in the same letter, she also wrote about her yearning for a pair of new moccasins, which she missed so much.

Susan adapted well to East Coast schooling. She attended the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies in New Jersey as a child and later went to Hampton College. The young Susan was thin, barely more than 5-foot-5 and wore calico dresses and her hair in braids. She left the traditional Omaha life-style by the time she was 10.

She was homesick often, but one class, human anatomy, took her mind off the Nebraska prairies that she missed. She was fascinated with the skeleton, how people were put together and how they got sick.

At home, she saw people falling ill and dying under the watch of doctors who did not care about her people.

As a young girl, she tended to a sick Omaha woman. The woman grew increasingly weak throughout the night, and Su-



san sent for a doctor four times. The doctor promised to come each time.

He never showed up, and the woman died in agony.

“It was only an Indian, and it did not matter,” Susan bitterly recalled to a reporter later in her life. “The doctor preferred hunting for prairie chickens rather than visiting poor, suffering humanity.”

Two other tragedies inspired Susan to reach for medicine: Her father lost his leg because of an untreated infection, and her brother died in infancy.

When she was 6, her father took her and her sisters aside and asked them, “My dear young daughters, do you always want to be simply called ‘those Indians,’ or do you want to go to school and be somebody in the world?”

“From that moment,” Susan wrote, “I determined to make something useful of myself.”

Many women of the era were becoming teachers, but Susan wanted to do more. As a physician she would directly impact her people by working in their homes, and she would gain more personal satisfaction from the work. She dreamed of building her own hospital on the reservation.

Susan was insistent on attending medical school, but she faced two problems: funding and negative societal attitudes.

With the help of a Connecticut women’s group and the government, Susan received

**DR. SUSAN LA FLESCHE PICOTTE** became the first Native American woman to earn a medical degree when she graduated from the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia in 1889. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*

# WALTHILL, NEB.

POPULATION: **859**

**71.3%** of population is Native American

LAND AREA: **0.43** SQUARE MILES

**10.8%** of people ages 25 and older have bachelor's degrees

GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ



\$167 in tuition money, a sizeable amount each year. The Connecticut Indian Association provided her with clothes, food and lodging.

It was the first time the government had given any assistance to a Native person for higher education.

But it came at a cost.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs John D. C. Atkins hoped Susan would become an “instrument of change,” undermining the traditional medicine men’s influence on the tribe.

Susan excelled in school. She graduated at the top of her class of 36 at the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania.

At graduation, Professor James Walker spoke lavishly about Susan’s accomplishments.

“Her courage, consistency and ability has brought her this far in the fulfillment of a desire to see her people independent,” Walker said.

After graduating and taking a yearlong internship at the hospital in Philadelphia, Susan returned to the reservation to serve her people. She begged to be the reservation doctor but was turned down. She instead took a job at the school treating the children in August 1889.

Her goals were simple, but they proved to make significant changes for the tribe. She promoted the importance of cleanliness, order and ventilation, how to take care of their bodies as well as care for their souls.

“I’m not accomplishing miracles,” she wrote to her sisters, “but I’m beginning to see some of the results of better hygiene and health habits. And we’re losing fewer babies and fewer cases to infection.”

## The doctor is in

In late 1889, Susan finally began her job as the reservation doctor, but few trusted her. She had been indoctrinated by the white ways, but the nearest doctor was 18 miles away. She was the best thing they had.

Her first case squelched skepticism among the Omaha people. She cured an 8-year-old Omaha boy of what accounts say was an undescribed “childhood ailment.” The next day she went to check on the boy: He was playing happily in a creek.

The boy’s rapid recovery won her “no end of fame,” according to Susan.

Soon Omahas were flocking to her. Business was booming. She was even beginning to treat some of the white people from neighboring communities – they trusted her more than any male doctor.

Many would try to fit into her minuscule office, a 12-by-16 building that had enough room for a counter,

shelves stocked with drugs, and a small space for magazines, books and games. It functioned not only as a doctor’s office but also as a community meeting place.

Her wages and medical goods were just as meager as her workspace.

When the government ran out of supplies to give to the reservation hospital, she spent her own money for medicine and supplies, even though she earned only \$500 a year – more than 10 times less than what Army and Navy physicians were making at the time.

Yet she worked harder than most physicians out there, according to Omaha Tribe historian Dennis Hastings.

“My office hours are any and all hours of the day and night,” Susan once told her superiors. At night, Susan would light a lantern and keep it in her window – a signal for ailing families that she was there to help.

During the winter of 1891, Dr. Susan saw more than 100 patients each month – many of which were house calls she made in temperatures below zero. She would travel miles in the snow and wind with just her chestnut-colored horse, Pie, and buggy during minus 20-degree days.

Susan’s 20-hour workdays took their toll on her health. Dr. Susan, ironically, suffered from health issues for more than 20 years while treating others for their illnesses. She became frail at a young age and had difficulty breathing, experienced “a kind of numbness” throughout her body and worked through neck, back and head pains. In 1892, she was bed-ridden for nearly two months.

In 1893, she was bucked from her horse and suffered a catastrophic injury that kept her from speaking at the World’s Fair in Chicago that year.

The once plump-faced, strong young woman was becoming fragile and thin. In many photos taken in her later years, her eyes look pained.

“Stress, I’m sure, did her in,” said Hastings, the Omaha historian.

For four years, work consumed her life. Then in 1893, her mother got sick.

Susan had to make a choice: her family or her career.

She chose her family and took time for herself and her mother. During that time Susan’s sister’s husband fell ill, as well. His brother Henry Picotte came to help with their farm. Susan was enamored with his dedication and good looks, and they were engaged by the spring of 1894.

**DR. SUSAN LA FLESCHE PICOTTE** treated the Natives of Walthill, Neb., as well as many white patients from surrounding areas. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*

**“FROM THAT MOMENT, I DETERMINED TO MAKE SOMETHING USEFUL OF MYSELF.”**

– SUSAN LA FLESCHE PICOTTE  
OMAHA DOCTOR





**DR. SUSAN LA FLESCHÉ PICOTTE**

(above) sits with her two sons and her mother, Mary La Flesché, who was also known as One Woman.

(Right) The home when she lived in it and its present-day state. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*



**THEIR WORDS**

DR. SUSAN LA FLESCHÉ PICOTTE AND HER INFLUENCE:



“DR. SUSAN COULD VERY WELL EMERGE AS ONE OF THE MORE NOTABLE HEROINES IN AMERICAN HISTORY.”

—DENNIS HASTINGS  
OMAHA TRIBE HISTORIAN

“MY DEAR YOUNG DAUGHTERS, DO YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE SIMPLY CALLED ‘THOSE INDIANS,’ OR DO YOU WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL AND BE SOMEBODY IN THE WORLD?”

—JOSEPH LA FLESCHÉ  
FATHER

GRAPHIC: LIZ GAMEZ



**DR. SUSAN LA FLESCHÉ PICOTTE** (second from left, holding baby) at a Native American church meeting. LaFlesché Picotte (standing below) with Nettie Fremont, Mary Tyndall and Marguerite La Flesché, circa 1880. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*

The couple was married in June 1894 and moved to Bancroft, Neb.

Susan told her friends that she loved him very much even though they were “utterly unlike” each other. Henry Picotte was a Sioux Indian from Yankton, S.D. He was a “handsome man with polite, integrating manners, and a happy sense of humor,” Susan wrote. She and Henry had two sons named Caryl and Pierre.

However, Henry struggled with alcoholism, a social problem Susan would fight against most of her adult life. He later died from drinking while trying to stave off tuberculosis.

Henry’s death further fueled Susan’s desire to rid the reservation of alcohol. She helped pass legislation that banned it for many years. Her missionary work also fed her belief that alcohol was a curse that kept her people down.

In the later years of her life, Susan fought against the spread of tuberculosis by promoting fresh air, discouraging the sharing of common cups at the well and encouraging cleanliness in discarding trash and killing flies, known spreaders of tuberculosis.

Even after helping her people for nearly 25 years, she aimed higher. During her college years, she dreamed of creating a reservation hospital. Her dreams were realized as her hospital opened in 1913. She never had many opportunities to serve as a doctor at her hospital because of her health, but the effects were apparent on the reservation.

The hospital saved lives of those who might not have otherwise been treated.

## The makings of a legend

Susan died in the early hours of Sept. 18, 1915.

At age 50, the degenerative bone disease she suffered from for years finally took her life.

During her lifetime, she served more than 1,300 people in more than 450 square miles. Motivated by her faith and her father’s activism, she found common ground between whites and members of the Omaha Nation while never abandoning her tribal roots.

Many of the people she served came to her funeral in her small Walthill home. Newspaper reports said people were overflowing into the yard.

Three priests gave eulogies, and an Omaha tribe member said the closing prayer in the Omaha language – a final testament to her ability to bridge the gap between whites and Natives.

Her body rests with her husband in a cemetery just off the highway south of Bancroft.

The tombstone reads “Until the Day Dawns.”

Today, Susan’s hospital in Walthill serves as a drug and abuse treatment center, a cause Farley thinks Susan would have approved of.

While Susan’s legacy burns bright in the minds of older residents on the reservation, the younger generations have yet to learn about her. It’s a story, Hastings thinks, that needs to be taught.

“Her story is a litany of frontier vignettes of which classic legends are made, and it needs no embellishment,” writes historian Hastings. “Dr. Susan could very well emerge as one of the more notable heroines in American History.” ☺



**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Vida Stabler would like more people knowing who Susan La Flesché Picotte was.



Vida Stabler talks about studying Susan La Flesché Picotte in order to portray her in a play.



Links to more photos and numbers about healing issues.







# FINDING A HEALTHY BALANCE

In order to combat health issues on the reservation, Native healers integrate modern medicine with traditional methods to treat both the body and mind.

STORY BY **JORDAN PASCALE**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**





On an early spring afternoon, nestled in a steep ravine in the middle of the Pine Ridge Reservation, the inside of her cramped trailer has an orange glow and smells of pine and sweet grass. Vibrant red and yellow star quilts adorn the walls, both now yellowed from nicotine and age. Tiny plastic bags of medicinal plants – sage for colds, bitterroot for toothaches, valerian and mint tea for insomnia – peek out of a large plastic box on the kitchen table.

Today, Rose Mesteth is reflecting on her former nursing career and how all the herbs and plants found in the homeland of the Oglala Lakotas have changed her view of Western medicine.

After two years as a Vietnam combat nurse and 28 years at an Indian Health Service hospital, Mesteth had had enough.

She left nursing and returned to her roots, to the way her grandparents had taught her to heal with plants.

She believes in treating people – not just their bodies.

Mesteth is stuck between two worlds. On one side is modern medicine. On the other are the traditions of her people. It's been that way for as long as she can remember.

**“THIS HEALING WILL EVENTUALLY DIE. MOST OF THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS ARE JUST NOT INTERESTED IN THIS. THEY ARE TOO CLOSE-MINDED AND HAVE BEEN INDOCTRINATED WITH THE IDEA THAT ‘THE WHITE WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY.’”**

– ROSE MESTETH  
LAKOTA HEALER

“Western medicine wants to only heal the body, but you’ve got to look at something else, too: mind, heart, soul, spirit,” Mesteth said. “At the point the body shows physical ailments, some other problem hasn’t been dealt with, and it manifests itself in sickness.”

Although Native healing traditions typically are linked to medicine men, women historically had a significant influence on the health and well being of their families. In fact, for many tribes, it was women who treated the sick, restored balance to the spiritually wounded and gathered medicinal plants, the uses and whereabouts of which had been passed down by elders.

Today, after generations of drastic social and cultural changes, many Native Americans face epidemics of diabetes, alcoholism and obesity. But some are countering the devastating health problems by merging the old ways with the new. And often it is young Native women who are spearheading this effort.

A prominent example is Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord, a Stanford-trained physician who was the first Navajo woman to become a board-certified surgeon. But in

1991, when she returned to work in a Navajo community in New Mexico, she discovered that “although I was a good surgeon, I was not always a good healer.”

So she sought help from a Hataalii, a Navajo medicine man. He told her to connect with her Navajo patients, who felt powerless within the impersonal Western model, by incorporating more harmony and positive thinking into her practice.

Today, Alvord, who now helps train the next generation of doctors at the Dartmouth Medical School, encompasses many aspects of the role healers traditionally played in Native culture. She also reflects how that role is adapting to meet the medical challenges of today and tomorrow. That role includes:

- A traditional approach focusing on long-established tribal healing practices
  - The modern medical professionals who blend Western medicine with the traditional
  - Understanding how mind, body, soul and the environment affect health, what the Navajo call *hózhó*, meaning “everything in beauty”
  - Trying to drastically curtail the high rates of disease plaguing Indian Country
  - Native students investing in medical careers to improve the lives of their people
- “Someday,” Alvord said, “many more patients may be introduced to traditional Native healing principles and the concept of *hózhó*.”

“We are more comfortable and we heal better when we are at peace with our treatment,” Alvord said. “If we have a beautiful surrounding and doctors who connect with the patients and patients who participate in their healing, we are better off as a health care community.”

## Roots of Native medicine

During the bitter cold winter of 1535, French explorer Jacques Cartier’s North American expedition lost 25 men to scurvy. Isolated and desperate in present-day upstate New York, Cartier encountered a local Iroquois chief who took him to the women healers of his tribe.

The medicine women gathered bark and needles from the hemlock, a “magical tree,” boiled the branches and needles and then told the explorers to drink the concoction. It saved every explorer’s life.

“No amount of drugs from Europe or Africa,” Cartier wrote in his journal, “could have done what the Iroquois drugs did in a week.”

Although traditional Native healing practices vary among tribes, most are deeply embedded in Native culture and religion: The Navajo practice sandpainting; the Lakota use sweat lodges to heal; and the Iroquois’ False Face Society relied on wooden masks to frighten evil spirits from the body. Traditionally, many tribes also used plants, herbs and roots to heal the sick.

Sanapia, a traditional Comanche medicine woman who died in 1968, specialized in treating a type of recurring paralysis she called “ghost sickness.” Like many others, Sanapia became a healer through family tradition and by conquering her own illnesses.

She first diagnosed her patients’ spiritual problems

# WESTERN VS. NATIVE MEDICINE

A LOOK AT HOW TWO CULTURES DIFFER IN THEIR APPROACHES TO HEALTH CARE

	WESTERN	NATIVE AMERICAN
<b>THEORY</b>	Healing the person or community	Pathology and curing the disease
<b>OUTLOOK</b>	Diseases don't have simple explanations, outcomes aren't always measurable	Diseases are biological, treatment should produce measurable outcomes
<b>QUESTION</b>	"What can the disease teach the patient?"	"How can I destroy this disease?"
<b>BASIS</b>	Based on spiritual truths and intuition	Based on scientific theory and intellect.
<b>BELIEFS</b>	Healer's are health counselors Reliance on giving patients confidence and awareness	Physicians are authorities. Dependence on medication and technology.
<b>FOCUS</b>	Focuses on patient's environment: "Are the salmon in your rivers ill?"	Focuses on patient's family: "Did your mother have cancer?"

SOURCE: LAURANCE JOHNSTON, PH.D., FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: [HTTP://WWW.HEALINGTHERAPIES.INFO/NATIVE-AMERICAN%20MEDICINE.HTM](http://www.healingtherapies.info/native-american%20medicine.htm)  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

and gave them a purifying bath to reduce the power of harmful spirits. She then summoned an eagle spirit helper to find appropriate herbs. In a trancelike state, she would chant and massage the patient with herbs.

Shortly before her death, she said she was not opposed to scientific medicine but believed her cures offered more complete and permanent relief because they attacked the root cause.

Sanapia knew the uniqueness of her skills and her position in her tribe, but she foresaw the final end of her traditions.

"I just can't think how it came this way. Maybe I should be with my (dead) grandmother because my way is getting no good today," Sanapia said as she sat overlooking skyscrapers in Oklahoma City. "Even my own kids growing up like white people, they think I'm a funny old woman."

Today, women like the Oglala's Mesteth, who teaches a summer camp on traditional herbal healing, keep some of these traditions alive by spreading the knowledge passed down by elders.

Although traditional herbal healing is popular on Pine Ridge, she said, it will never become mainstream because of too many regulations, misconceptions and fierce opposition from drug companies.

"This healing will eventually die," says Mesteth, whose mother and grandmother used herbs and plants to treat the sick. "Most of the younger generations are just not interested in this. They are too close-minded and have been indoctrinated with the idea that 'the white way is the right way.'"

## Facing a constant challenge

In the early years of the 20th century, Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte kept a yellow lantern on her front porch every night, a beacon of hope for many sick Omaha Nation families and white neighbors desperate for medical care.

The young Omaha woman was first Native female

doctor in the U.S.

As a doctor, Picotte became so active in the community that she was the informal leader of the Omahas. She dreamed of opening her own reservation hospital, a dream realized in 1913, just two years before her death.

"Her story is a litany of frontier vignettes of which classic legends are made, and it needs no embellishment," Dennis Hastings, historian for the Omaha Tribe, noted in a La Flesche biography. "Dr. Susan could very well emerge as one of the more notable heroines in American history."

A century later, Dr. Alvord, who grew up in a remote town on the Navajo Reservation, skirted cultural, class and educational boundaries to become part of a medical world where minorities received few opportunities.

In fact, her college advisers at the University of New Mexico told Alvord to not get her hopes up and even discouraged her from attending medical school.

In her book "The Scalpel and the Silver Bear," Alvord says colleagues told her, "As a minority physician you will constantly be challenged, your decisions will be questioned, your authority doubted. To be successful you will have to have higher standards than anyone else."

Those words still hold true, she said, as her authority is questioned in the operating room and occasionally at Dartmouth.

Alvord's Navajo heritage also created unique problems. By custom, her people aren't allowed to touch the dead, and it's unacceptable to touch other people without knowing them.

Yet throughout her medical career, she routinely touched cadavers and operated on patients. She justified her actions because they saved lives.

After a successful six-year stint as a surgeon in Gallup, N.M., Alvord returned to her alma mater, Dartmouth Medical School, where she is the associate dean of Student and Multicultural Affairs.

One day, she hopes to open her own hospital back



# “THE SUPPORT OF US WHO HAVE ALREADY WALKED THIS PATH WILL SERVE AS ROLE MODELS TO THE UPCOMING GENERATIONS WHO WISH TO PRACTICE MEDICINE.”

— RACHEL RAY  
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
MEDICAL SCHOOL STUDENT

on the Navajo reservation — a hospital with aesthetic beauty and a sense of calm, a hospital in hózhó.

## Striving for hózhó

The word hózhó is almost lost in translation. Harmony, peace, balance and beauty are as close as it gets.

To be in hózhó is to be deeply connected to your environment — an ideology that defines Navajo, and to some extent, the Native philosophy of healing.

A Navajo prayer states: “Beauty is before me, and beauty behind me, above me and below me, hovers the beautiful. I am surrounded by it, I am immersed in it. In my youth, I am aware of it, and in old age I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail. In beauty it is begun. In beauty it is ended.”

Mind, body, soul, spirit — medicine and religion are one and the same, Alvord said. It’s the concept of finding the underlying problem that is causing the illness, rather than simply curing the ailments. It’s about being in balance, having harmony in all facets of life.

“It sounds mystical and spiritual, but it sounds like how science describes us,” Alvord said. “Carbon creatures share and exchange carbons all the time. We are interconnected with the world.”

So she looks for the places in the patients’ lives — relationships, work, community and environment — where things are out of balance. When she finds them, she conveys them to the patients, who then have to make the lifestyle changes. She can only give the recommendations.

She also looks at the environment. In 1993, for ex-

ample, a mysterious disease swept through her New Mexico reservation.

That year, a wet summer triggered a large fall crop of pinon nuts, which in turn triggered an explosion of deer mice. The mouse droppings contained a hantavirus that unleashed multiple problems, including flu-like symptoms. She eventually lost a patient to the disease. It was one of her first deaths.

In Alvord’s words, the natural patterns of the universe were disturbed. Everything had not been in hózhó.

## Confronting Native health issues

More than any other population in America, Natives face significantly higher rates of alcoholism, obesity, cancer, tuberculosis and diabetes. And it is often Native women who are fighting the effects of these killers.

Diabetes is a significant concern for Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, director of Indian Health Service, who has worked on diabetes prevention and care research for 12 years. More than 9 percent of Native Americans have Type 2 diabetes — almost three times the nation’s rate.

“When you think that none of our tribes really had any substantial or even recognizable problem with diabetes 100 years ago, and now in some of our communities, one out of every two adults has diabetes, you think about what’s the difference between then and now?” said Roubideaux, a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe. “The whole way people live their lives is different.”

With modernization comes decreased physical activity; with a Western diet comes larger portions and



**SANDPAINTING** Padre Liebler and Hoshkan, both Navajo, create a Crucifix sandpainting. *Utah State Historical Society.*



**SWEAT LODGE** A Native American man sits in front of a sweat lodge. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*



higher rates of obesity. Add it all up, Roubideaux said, and the result is an outbreak of chronic problems like heart disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes.

Cancer rates, previously reported to be lower in Natives, have increased significantly in the past 20 years. It's now the second-leading cause of death (heart disease is the number one killer) among Natives older than 45, according to the National Library of Medicine.

And cancer is no stranger to Dr. Marilyn Roubidoux of the Rosebud Sioux, whose relatives have fought many battles with the disease. She finds satisfaction in bringing mobile mammograms to reservations where breast cancer screenings aren't readily available.

When she pursued radiology in college, she didn't know how it would relate to helping her people until she helped develop this remote mammogram method.

"I thought, 'Maybe this is what I'm supposed to do,'" said Roubidoux, who graduated from the University of Utah School of Medicine in 1984.

Meanwhile, Dr. Jennifer Giroux, a Rosebud Sioux physician, started her career as an epidemic intelligence officer with the Indian Health Service. For more than a

decade as a medical epidemiologist, she promoted preventive measures to lower the rates of tuberculosis and HIV infection, cervical and breast cancers and diabetes among Native populations.

In 1998, Dr. Giroux investigated the 17 American Indian tuberculosis cases in South Dakota and found a 41 percent mortality rate.

Historically, the majority of TB cases in South Dakota are found in the Native population, a population that makes up about 7 percent of the state's population but 70 percent of its TB cases. It was unusual to see such a high mortality rate, she said, noting that TB rates have declined in the past decade.

"It is still a significant health disparity, and it is decreasing slower for American Indians than ideal," Giroux said.

But Native people, she said, are more knowledgeable about the free prevention "available to all of us when we exercise, get the rest we need, eat healthy and avoid excess alcohol."

Alvord, the Navajo surgeon, said processed foods and stagnant lifestyles are killing her people, who tra-

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**DR. LORI ARVISO ALVORD** reads from her book "The Scalpel and the Silver Bear" on April 14, 2009, at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*

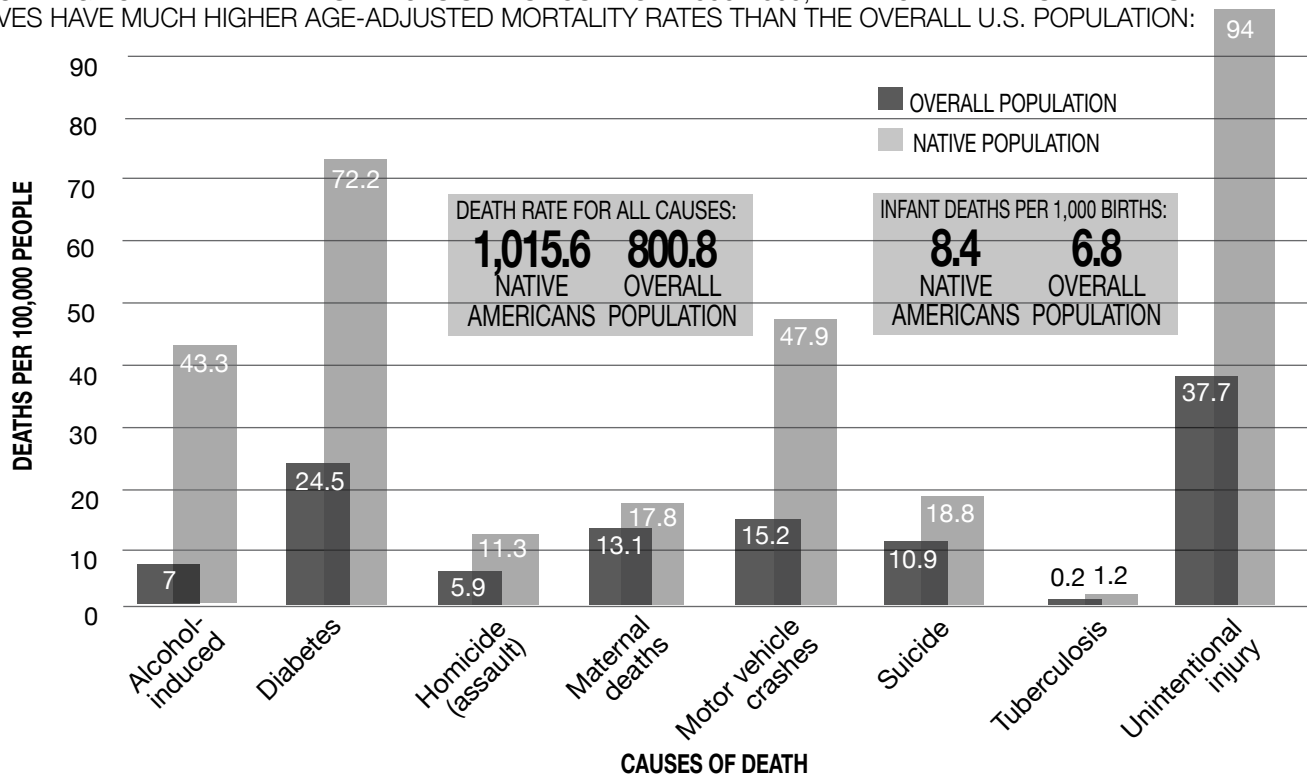
**"AS A MINORITY PHYSICIAN YOU WILL CONSTANTLY BE CHALLENGED, YOUR DECISIONS WILL BE QUESTIONED, YOUR AUTHORITY DOUBTED. TO BE SUCCESSFUL YOU WILL HAVE TO HAVE HIGHER STANDARDS THAN ANYONE ELSE."**

— DR. LORI ARVISO ALVORD  
NAVAJO SURGEON, AUTHOR



# DEATH RATES ON THE RESERVATION

ACCORDING TO INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES STATISTICS FROM 1996-2005, AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKAN NATIVES HAVE MUCH HIGHER AGE-ADJUSTED MORTALITY RATES THAN THE OVERALL U.S. POPULATION:



SOURCE: IHS FACT SHEETS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO [HTTP://INFO.IHS.GOV/DISPARITIES.ASP](http://info.ihs.gov/disparities.asp)  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

ditionally had diets high in vegetables and grains and had active lifestyles.

“Obesity was rare for our people 150 years ago,” she said. “The new foods they gave us devastated our population. If we return back to our original ways and diet, we may be able to decrease health care disparities and the harmful effects of obesity.”

Meanwhile, alcohol-related deaths account for 11.7 percent of all deaths among Native people, which is twice the rate of the general population.

“I think IHS has a role in improving the health of the community and encouraging healthy habits, but we can’t do it alone,” Roubideaux said. “The resources we have are for immediate care services. Until the budget increases, it limits what we can do.”

Because of a small budget, reducing alcoholism isn’t a priority for IHS, Roubideaux said.

## The Native path to a medical career

The stories of three young Native women in different parts of the country are almost identical: They waited for hours to see a doctor and endured crowded hospitals — conditions that have partially inspired each to seek a medical career.

Shontel Mousseau, an Oglala Lakota high school student on the Pine Ridge Reservation, loves children. She wants to leave her impoverished reservation, become a family physician, then return home to treat Lakota children.

“I want kids to feel comfortable with their doctor,” Mousseau said. “I want to make our community feel better.”

Rachel Ray, a Cherokee who graduated from medical school at Oklahoma State University, became inspired after shadowing a Native doctor at an IHS clinic in Oklahoma City. Someday, she

wants to connect with her patients not only on a medical level but also on a cultural one.

“I think a sad part of Indian health care is the way patients feel about their providers,” said Ray, who is now completing a three-year residency in family medicine at the University of Oklahoma in Tulsa. “Most physicians serving in IHS are not of Native American descent and do not have a full understanding of the culture.”

But groups like the Association of Native American Medical Students are striving to provide support and create a resource network that would increase the number of Native medical students.

Naomi Young, a medical student at the University of Arizona, grew up learning about traditional medicine from her grandfather but was mostly treated in the Western way. Throughout her training, she’s tried to incorporate Navajo prayer and walking in beauty, or hózhó, at school.

A former president of the Native medical student group, Young said ANAMS will help bridge the ratio gap of Native patients to Native physicians. The statistics are providing some hope. More Native women are finishing college than ever before, and more are entering the medical field.

The number of Native women applicants to medical school has increased since 2003. It peaked in 2007 when 77 Native women applied across the nation. During the past decade, an average of 24 Native women were accepted each year.

Ray said the increasing numbers of Native women students encourage her and said she hopes it will continue.

“The support of those of us who have already walked this path will serve as role models to the upcoming generations who wish to practice medicine,” Ray said. “These students can see that no matter your upbringing or where you came from, you should always pursue your dreams and never give up.”

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Rose Mesteth demonstrates a natural toothache remedy on Pine Ridge Reservation.



Mesteth teaches a lesson about differences between the “white world” and “Indian Country.”



Links to more stories about medical issues on reservations.

# HEALING THE IHS

## DR. YVETTE ROUBIDEAUX USES A COMBINATION OF CONVERSATION AND OPTIMISM TO IMPROVE THE INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

STORY BY JORDAN PASCALE

**A**s a child growing up in Rapid City, S.D., Dr. Yvette Roubideaux hated waiting in the cramped lobby at the local Indian Health Service Clinic. So she would bring a backpack full of books to keep her occupied during the often four-hour-long waits to see one of 10 staff physicians.

Year after year, the clinic was chronically underfunded and overstressed.

As she got older, she heard her relatives complain about the long waits and how they never saw the same doctor. Eventually, those complaints helped motivate the 46-year-old Rosebud Sioux to become a physician.

"I heard a great metaphor for IHS: It's a really good car. It just needs more gas," said Dr. Roubideaux, who, in 2009, became the first female Native American director of the Indian Health Service. "The system is so stretched. I was visiting an area office, and everybody who introduced themselves had three or four jobs that normally you'd expect one person to do."

The circumstances hadn't changed much once she began working at a rural Arizona IHS clinic after graduating with a master's degree in public health in 1997 from Harvard Medical School. She always had ideas about things she could change about health care, about the system, but there wasn't much she could do as a physician.

Now, she's calling the shots.

It wasn't long before she realized she had inherited an agency that was chronically underfunded, yet is responsible for a population that suffers far higher rates of diabetes, alcoholism, tuberculosis and suicide than the general population. Natives born today have a life expectancy that is 4.6 years shorter than the general U.S. population, according to IHS (72.3 years to 76.9 years, respectively).

It's even shorter for those living on rural reservations. There, residents can expect to live only 66 years because care often is delivered by overtaxed medical staff working with outdated equipment in aging buildings.

But Roubideaux isn't hitting the panic button yet.

The budget is the biggest obstacle, according to IHS officials. They say the current \$3.6 billion is a little more than half of what they need to fully fund the agency's mission — which is to provide comprehensive health care to 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

It's common knowledge around the reservation to "don't get sick after June," when federal money often runs out until the new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1.

But Roubideaux, the eternal optimist, is taking pride in the improvements to health care thus far — like the fact that life expectancy for Natives has increased nine years since 1973.

She said more change is needed and she has met with tribes and asked them to recommend those changes.

"Instead of coming in and saying we're doing X-Y-Z, I'm asking the tribes, 'If we're going to improve the Indian Health Service, where should we start? What are your priorities?'" she said.

Gerald Hill, president of the Association of American Indian Physicians, commended Roubideaux during her confirmation hearing as someone who "not only understands Western medicine but how to apply this knowledge in Native communities."

"We have all the elements in place to really address these health disparities," Roubideaux said. "It's just that we need two things: If we can begin to address the problem of resources, we can do a lot. But the second area is how we're providing that care and making sure we're doing it in the best way possible." 🌍



**DR. YVETTE ROUBIDEAUX** wants to link tribes' priorities to an overhaul of the Indian Health Service. *Courtesy of Indian Health Service*







# DARLING TO DEFEY

Tell her no, and she'll tell you yes. Push her down, and she'll get back up. Tell her she'll fail, and watch her flourish. **Darla Black** is a fighter.

She wheels around town in a black-as-death, two-door, \$15,000 truck. At 5-foot-5, she has a hefty step to clamber aboard the '92 GMC Sierra pick-up. But she doesn't care. It feels good to drive this big mother.

It feels good because it arrived courtesy of the Oglala Sioux Tribe Department of Public Safety, which she says has fired Darla Black 22 times.

At 47, the Lakota U.S. Army veteran said she has waged war in tribal court 20 times for what she calls unwarranted terminations throughout a 25-year law enforcement career.

Why? Let her count the reasons:

Terminated because she's outspoken.

Fired for blowing the whistle on internal corruption.

Shoved aside because she's an educated woman.

But Darla Black fights back. Of the 20 cases she says she's taken to court, she's won them all.

"Leave me alone, or you're gonna keep buying me cars," she said as a smile stretched across her face, a thin white scar visible above her lip.

STORY BY **KATIE STEARNS**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**



# Strength and independence seem generations apart after a near-half century of life. **But don't be misled by her pain or overwhelming sadness.** She's found herself inside of a jail cell and felt the brute force of



efore she joined the U.S. Army, before she dedicated her career to law enforcement and criminal investigation, before she pursued her bachelor's degree and reached deep inside herself only to find a spirituality she can't help but impart to others, Darla Black was an unhappy 7-year-old.

The young girl was keenly aware she didn't like moving around. But her mother's nursing career with Indian Health Service kept them on the move, so Darla moved into her grandmother's one-bedroom home in Manderson, S.D. – a home with no running water or electricity and a wood stove.

They lived off the land, eating fish and clams from a nearby creek, and dry deer meat. Corn, potatoes, onions, watermelon, squash, pumpkin, cantaloupe and mushrooms sprouted in a backyard garden.

But when some family members took to the bottle, the 16-year-old Darla moved in with Beverly Running Bear, a close family friend, who already was raising six other children.

"I just wanted them to get a better education and make something for themselves," Running Bear said. "Darla was the only one who seemed to stay around and listen."

But as an 18-year-old senior at the Oglala Community High School, Darla was pregnant and ashamed.

"I think when I stated showing, I quit going to school because I didn't want my peers to know," she said.

Without a high school diploma, Darla knew she had to do something to better herself, and with a literal push from Run-

ning Bear, she enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1980 and shipped off to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., for U.S. Army basic training, leaving a baby daughter with her grandmother.

The day Darla walked inside the fort gates, she saw a sign that read, "Make me or break me."

"At the time, I didn't understand that meaning. But let me tell you, when I walked outta those gates, I understood what it meant," she said.

Now, almost 30 years later, Darla has served six years in the Army and Army National Guard. She has her GED certificate and is working on a human services degree from a community college in Lincoln and is now only a few credits shy of a bachelor's degree in criminal justice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Growing up, her grandmother had always stressed two things: Lakota spiritual beliefs and the importance of education.

"She said in my day, the only way we would survive was through education. We had to educate ourselves," Darla said. That "would be the only way you're gonna keep up with the white man's way of changing things."

## Q&A

### DARLA BLACK BIOGRAPHY

**BIRTHDAY:** March 20, 1961

**CHILDREN:** Koren, Ronald and George

**WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST PET PEEVE?**  
Racism and prejudices

**WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL?**  
Tom Osborne

**HOMETOWN:** Manderson, S.D

**WHAT MOTTO DO YOU LIVE BY?**  
My traditional teachings of honesty, compassion, courage and I would say the desire to always help people.

**WHAT'S YOUR BEST ADVICE TO YOUTH?**  
Education is the key.



# erously sprinkled throughout her **mistaken:** She's no stranger to hurt or faced outright discrimination, seen the force of a steel-toed boot to her face.

## Looking for a way out

But Darla's journey to a solid education and self-reliance was a haphazard one; long and difficult, it was a journey of twists and turns and dead-ends.

At first, her boyfriend was nice and kind. He'd come around Darla's grandmother's house, helping the elder with odd jobs. But three years into their relationship, he began to drink and hit, and the abuse didn't stop there.

"Psychological, physical, sexual," Darla said. "You name it, I experienced it."

Still, her grandmother urged her to stay with him.

"In her day, I guess you just did. You know, if you were married to somebody ... it was just something you had to do," Darla said. "You were committed to that man, regardless of what happens."

Her grandmother's opinion changed one day when the man came home drunk and angry.

He ripped Darla from the bathroom where she was washing their 2-year-old son. He grabbed her long, black hair, pulling so hard they tumbled down the stairs. He got up and kicked her hard in the face, following up with swift blows to her ribs and the rest of her body. He was wearing steel-toed boots.

Her face was numb, too numb to feel the pain when he kicked her front tooth out. She saw a bone protruding from her nose and a spurt of blood coming from her broken face, but she couldn't feel a thing.

She wanted to die, she thought she was going to die. But when she looked up, she saw her daughter peering down from the top of stairs. Something in Darla snapped.

"When I got beat up and I saw my daughter, she couldn't even cry. She just stood there looking at us, and that totally changed me in the inside."

Battered, bruised and bleeding, Darla took her three children and walked right out the door on that frigid January night. Darkness and snow were falling when the boyfriend decided to take their shoes and jackets, but Darla kept walking, barefoot, until a friend picked her up on the side of the road.

"It was humiliating to have everything taken away from me, and I didn't want that to happen again," she said.

The day she left was the day she realized she needed an education, to better herself,

**"WHEN I GOT BEAT UP AND I SAW MY DAUGHTER, SHE COULDN'T EVEN CRY. SHE JUST STOOD THERE LOOKING AT US, AND THAT TOTALLY CHANGED ME ON THE INSIDE."**

— DARLA BLACK,  
OGLALA LAKOTA



to pave the way for her children's future.

"You know, how am I going to support three children with no education, with nothing, absolutely nothing to offer?"

But that changed quickly. She enrolled in classes and hit the books. She also found something else, something that had been tucked inside most of her life.

## Connecting to spirituality

There was no light. Just the darkness, the drumbeat, the unforgiving heat, the sweat, the sizzling water, the red rocks. The initial panic of claustrophobia. The eventual acknowledgement of complete openness.

"You're in total darkness, I mean let me tell you, your senses come alive," she said of her first sweat lodge.

At 25, Darla realized this was her, all the

## DARLA BLACK

poses with her children. Darla had her first child when she was an 18-year-old senior at Oglala Community High School. She enlisted in the Army shortly after her daughter's birth. *Courtesy of Darla Black.*



stories her grandmother had told her about Lakota spirituality.

"It clicked," she said. "This is where I came from. This is where I belong."

Today, Darla's spirituality drifts into every corner, crack and crevice of her life – from the classroom to her career to friends and family and, most of all, to her people.

As an overnight employee at the Healing Circle, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in Lincoln, Neb., Darla worked from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Then she'd go home for a couple hours of sleep, attend a class, sleep some more, and hit two more classes and then back to work. For a while, she took a part-time job at McDonald's to earn extra cash.

And when she had free time during the week, she'd find her way back to the Healing Circle, ready to lead the recovering women addicts in a Lakota prayer ceremony – a gesture she did on her own, without pay.

Rachel Mulcahy, her former supervisor at Healing

Circle, said it was touching to see the way Darla connected with these women, the way they all grew silent and still as she, sage in hand,

blessed each and every woman.

"The clients found it really cleansing, getting back in touch with their higher power in a way that she defined from the standpoint of her Native American roots," Mulcahy said. "They were able to apply that same concept, whether or not they were Native American, to the whole idea of giving into someone or something beyond you."

When Darla took human services classes at South-

east Community College, she added an extra dimension to the class. She spoke up, she shared stories, and she sparked discussion.

"A big part of our curriculum ... has to deal with cross-cultural confidence," SCC professor Mike Kadivy said. Darla opened up about Lakota rituals, what it's like to be inside a sweat lodge and told the class that her Creator was the same as theirs.

When Darla spoke, he said, other students' eyes widened, their interest piqued. They wanted to hear stories of things they'd never experienced, memories they didn't know existed.

"She's a beautiful human being," Kadivy said. "Brings a lot of strength and compassion to everybody that she meets, and she's fun. Hell of a combination."

At work, Mulcahy picked up on this, too, even learning from Darla's firm beliefs.

"She was so connected to her beliefs, and the healthiness and the emotional security that those beliefs gave her," Mulcahy said. "She was totally in touch with that part of herself."

## Returning to her land

Thirty years ago, Darla couldn't get off the rez quick enough. Today, she can't stay away.

"Her strength is ... always trying to do good for the people. For our people, the Lakota people," Running Bear said.

"My wheels are always turning," Darla said. "What can I do for my people?"

And she's got some ideas: A substance abuse center near White Clay, Neb., and a child-friendly facility to report sexual abuse on the reservation, to name a couple.

"I have no desire to go work on another reservation," Darla said. "That's my home." ⊕

**"YOU'RE IN TOTAL DARKNESS,  
I MEAN LET ME TELL YOU,  
YOUR SENSES COME ALIVE."**

– DARLA BLACK  
OGLALA LAKOTA



**SGT. DARLA BLACK** (above) of the Wounded Knee District and her children. (Right) Darla and her grandmother. Black moved into her grandmother's house in Manderson, S.D., when she was 7, and it was her grandmother who encouraged her to continue her education, saying a good education "would be the only way you're gonna keep up with the white man's way of changing things." *Courtesy of Darla Black.*

## ON THE WEB

[nativedaughters.org](http://nativedaughters.org)



Darla Black sings and translates a traditional warrior song.



Darla Black, along with four other warriors, speaks about her experience in the military.



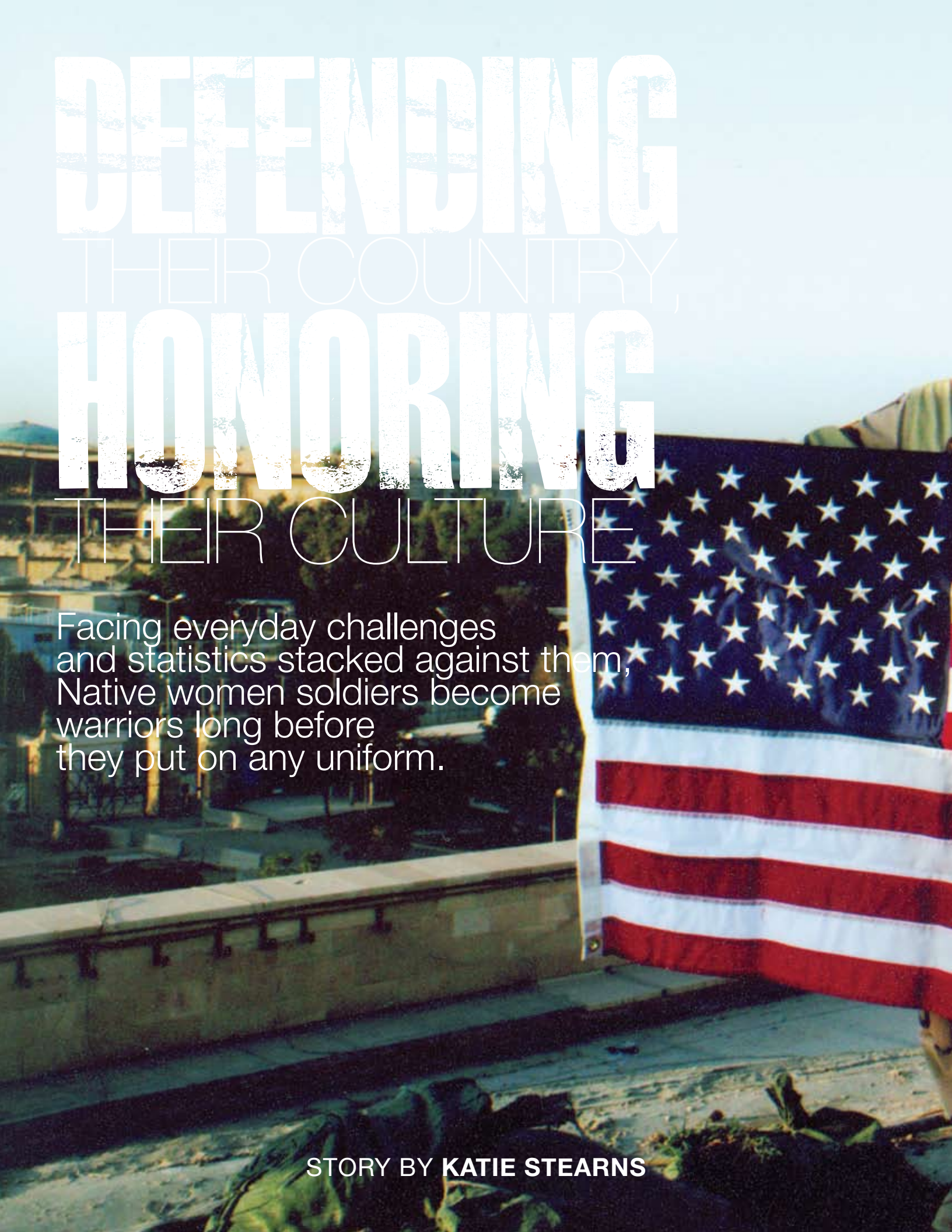
Links to more stories and numbers about Native women warriors.

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### DARLA BLACK

recounts her experiences in the armed forces to a Lincoln crowd. Black spent six years in the U.S. Army and National Guard. She says the saying on the gates of Fort Leonard Wood, "Make me or break me," had a great significance to her military career. "At the time, I didn't understand that meaning, but let me tell you, when I walked outta those gates, I understood what it meant," she said. *Photo by Clay Lomneth.*



The background of the page is a photograph of an American flag flying on a rooftop. The flag is the central focus, with its stars and stripes clearly visible. The scene is set at dusk or dawn, with a soft, hazy light in the sky. In the background, a cityscape with buildings and trees is visible, though slightly out of focus. The overall mood is patriotic and contemplative.

# DEFENDING THEIR COUNTRY, HONORING THEIR CULTURE

Facing everyday challenges and statistics stacked against them, Native women soldiers become warriors long before they put on any uniform.

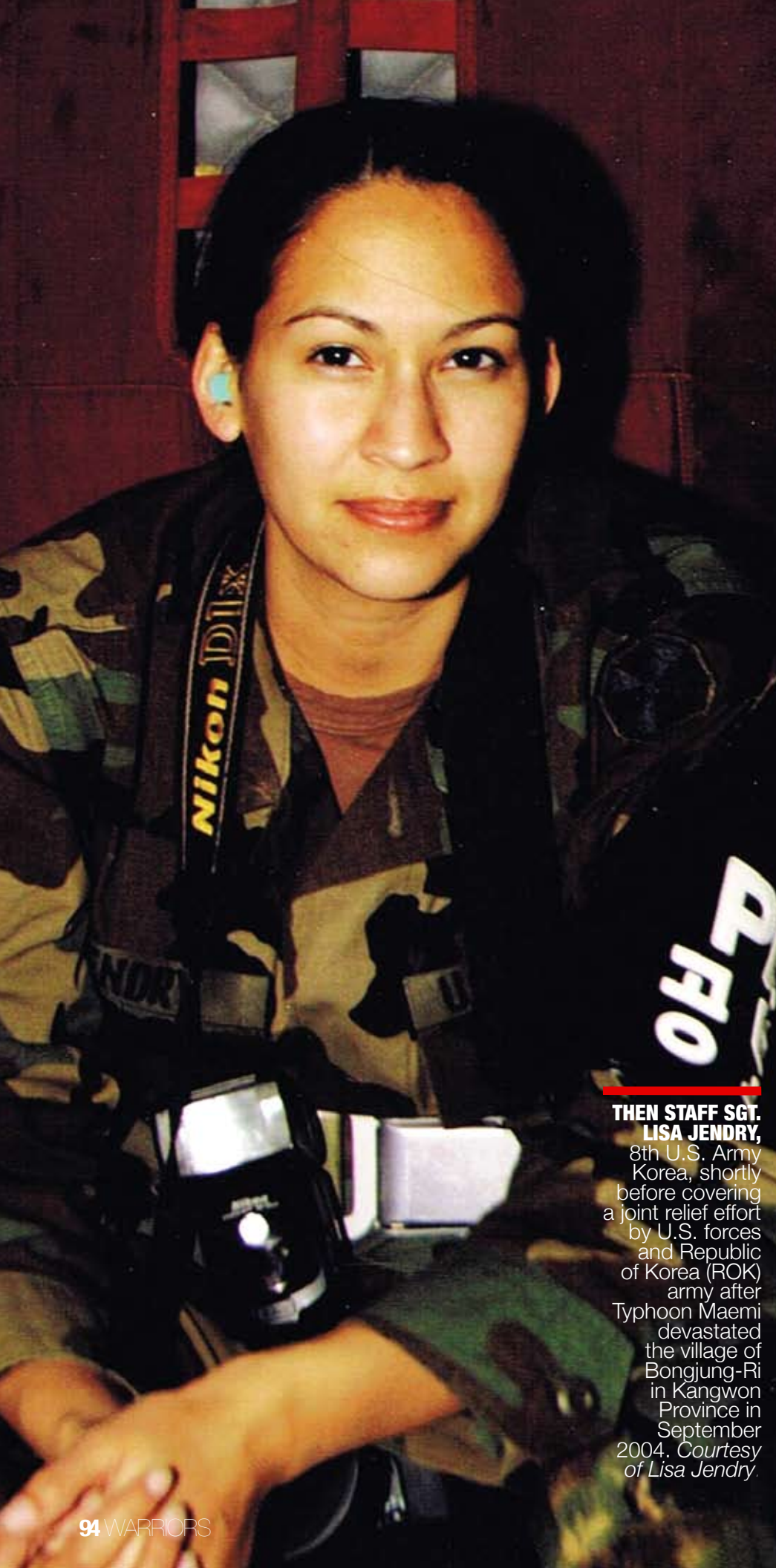
STORY BY **KATIE STEARNS**





**THEN STAFF SGT. LISA JENDRY** on top of the former Presidential Palace inside the International Zone during her deployment with the Multi-National Force in Baghdad, Iraq, from 2005 to 2006. *Courtesy of Lisa Jendry.*





**THEN STAFF SGT. LISA JENDRY,** 8th U.S. Army Korea, shortly before covering a joint relief effort by U.S. forces and Republic of Korea (ROK) army after Typhoon Maemi devastated the village of Bongjung-Ri in Kangwon Province in September 2004. *Courtesy of Lisa Jendry.*

It was January 1999, and her father was dying.

Doctors told the 42-year-old recovering alcoholic he had digestive problems. But after four years of misdiagnoses, and after his body rejected a heart transplant, Rickey Jendry had a massive heart attack.

On his deathbed, he made one thing clear to his Oglala Lakota daughter: Please get an education – it’s what I’ve always wanted for you but could never afford.

Seven days later, Lisa Jendry said goodbye to her Houston home and began an intense nine-week U.S. Army basic training program in Fort Jackson, S.C. Eventually, she endured a yearlong stint in the middle of Baghdad, analyzing Iraqi news at 4:30 each morning amid mortar shells thudding through the air. It’s also where she lost one of her closest friends to a roadside bomb, a few days before he was scheduled to go home to his wife. It’s a place where she accomplished so much but never got the chance to tell her father.

“I felt like he was with me for sure,” Lisa said. “I carried a little picture of him with me everywhere in my uniform.”

For Native Americans, the responsibility to protect and defend one's people has always been revered, and hundreds of generations later, that sentiment perseveres. But no longer are the front-line soldiers exclusively men. Women have seeped into the U.S. armed forces, manning tanks, shooting guns and evading bullets – tasks traditionally reserved for men. And in Native communities today, warrior status is as sacred as ever. Upon return, men and women veterans are highly respected, often elevated to the same social status as tribal elders.

"I met a lot of Native men and women who joined because there was a long family and tribal tradition of military tradition. They spoke about their grandparents who served in the Civil War," said Patty Loew, an Ojibwe who produced the documentary "Way of the Warrior."

For these Native women warriors, the experience goes beyond wearing a uniform and getting shipped overseas. It's more than surviving boot camp and the often hellish tour of duty that follows. The military service becomes a piece of these women, and for better or worse, it's there to stay, the influences reverberating throughout their communities.

"Today, if you define warrior the way I do, which is more broadly, protecting culture, language, traditions, it also is survival," said Loew, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "It's a cultural survival. And so the people that we define or describe as warriors are ensuring the survival of our communities. So of course we would revere them."

Historically, the importance of women warriors is laced throughout Native culture, carefully woven into the past. Today it remains a vital part of contemporary Native life and is likely to remain for generations to come. Regardless of the era, Native women warriors can find common ground in these issues:

- The reverence tied to the warrior's core dates back to tribal warrior societies
- The number of Native women enlisting in the armed forces is disproportionate, their reasons deep and complex
- Native women warriors face a greater chance of sexual harassment, which increases their chance of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and a long recovery
- PTSD, survivor's guilt and physical disabilities become heavy burdens, lightened by therapy, VA programs, and for some, traditional tribal healing practices

"It's an especially big honor," Jendry said. "It seems to be held especially close to our hearts because we can be warriors for our families, for our children."

## Showing courage

From the beginning, warrior societies pumped life into the tribes, protecting both their communities and their cultures.

Though men traditionally made up these groups, women's warrior societies were not unheard of, and their bravery was just as fierce.

Lozen, a 19th century Apache woman, was believed to have the ability to sense when enemies were near. Barely an adult, she fought against two of her tribe's fiercest foes – Mexican soldiers and scalp hunters. Tyonajanegen was an Oneida woman who fought alongside her husband during the American Revolution. During WWI, 14 Native women served in the Army Nurse Corps.

If women weren't fighting battles, their courage was reflected elsewhere.

"Just as a man might show deliberate courage in fighting the grizzly bear, the most ferocious and relentless of all animals, so might a woman display brav-

ery in killing an enemy, in warding off an attacker, or in protecting her family against any harm," Royal Hasrick wrote in "The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society."

Mark Awakuni-Swetland, an honorary member of the Omaha Nation and an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said warrior societies served two critical purposes for the Omaha people. They "had that role of maintaining internal harmony and at the same time protecting the people from external enemies."

Today, the function of warrior societies has shifted. Tribal color guards and pow-wows are the closest things to these societies. The Omaha Nation had the Gold Star Mothers, which started as a group of women who had lost loved ones at war. They organize and orchestrate the return of soldiers. \*

These ideals are deeply rooted throughout Indian Country.

"You go into combat, and you are brave, and you come home in an honorable way. Those aren't new values," Awakuni-Swetland said of his tribe. "Those are old values that were here way before white people came to this community."

## Serving the country

Almost 2 million women are now enlisted in the U.S. armed forces. Native American women comprise about 18,000 of those spots.

"That may sound small, but when you look at the population, that's actually pretty high," said Connie Mofitt, the minorities veterans coordinator at the Black Hills VA Center.

The high rate of Native women enlistment translates into intricate motives that can't be reduced to a simplified list.

"It's a really complex issue because there are lots of layers and motivation for Native American service," said Loew, who spent three years producing her documentary exploring Native service.

Many Native women sign up to get an education, escape tough times on the reservation, see the world or to make a positive impact in communities.

For Jan Malcom, a member of the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin, enlisting in the U.S. Army provided the opportunity to see a world she'd only read about.

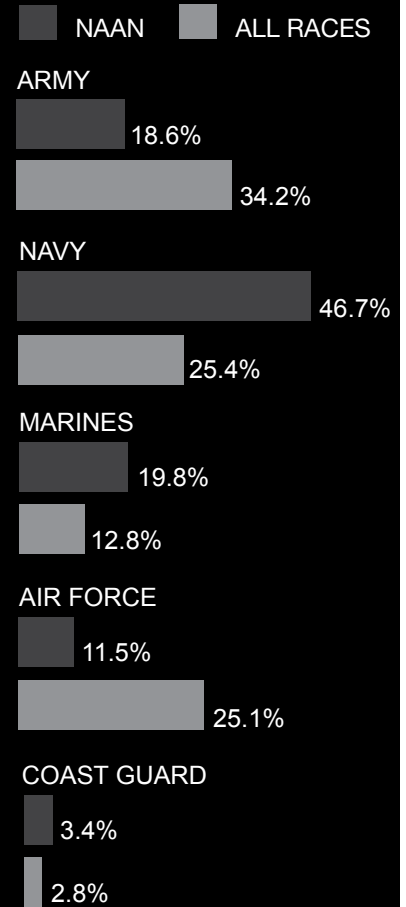
"When I was studying history in high school, I just loved the cobblestone streets, the old European countryside and buildings and everything else, and I thought, 'I want to get over there someday,'" Malcom said.

In 1965, after enlisting in the Women's Army Corp, the then 18-year-old spent two years stationed in Mons, Belgium, working as a communication specialist, decoding messages from around the world.

And when she could, she traveled. She visited the streets of London, the Tulip Festival in Holland, the Black Forest in Germany. And she saw Paris.

## NATIVE SERVICE BY BRANCH

Percentage distribution of Native American and Alaska Native active duty and all races, July 2005.



SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ



WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE WITH CHARITY FOR ALL



**DARLA BLACK**

speaks at an event at the Nebraska State Capitol honoring three women warriors. Photo by Clay Lomneth.

Although Stacey Stabler, of the Omaha Nation, enlisted in the Army Guard when she was 17, she knew she wanted to enlist when she was 8. And when she was 17, she needed both of her parents' signatures.

"They were actually ecstatic by that because ... they saw ... a way of improving yourself and your life, so it was really important for me to do that," Stabler said.

Darla Black, an Oglala Lakota and U.S. Army veteran, wanted to prove her uncles wrong.

When she approached them about joining the Army, "They said, 'No - a woman's place is at home.' And I decided to prove them wrong. They were wrong," said Black, who enlisted in the Army in 1980 and transferred

**"YOU GO INTO COMBAT, AND YOU ARE BRAVE, AND YOU COME HOME IN AN HONORABLE WAY. THOSE AREN'T NEW VALUES. THOSE ARE OLD VALUES THAT WERE HERE WAY BEFORE WHITE PEOPLE CAME TO THIS COMMUNITY."**

-MARK AWAKUNI-SWETLAND  
OMAHA NATION

to the National Guard as a supply specialist. Black also wanted to hop on a plane to escape the Pine Ridge Reservation and have an opportunity to get an education.

With fresh wounds from her father's death and the dream of an education, Jendry felt the pull of family ties.

Her mother served for four years as a lab technician in

Washington, D.C., at Fort Reed Army Medical Center during Vietnam. "I felt a really strong desire just to follow in her footsteps as a woman warrior," Jendry said.

Meanwhile, Linda Robinson of the Omaha Nation enlisted in 1968 with the Women's Army Corp. After a childhood speckled with her dad's WW II stories, the 18-year-old woman wanted to be a part of that tradition.

"I couldn't see why a Native woman couldn't do the same thing and serve her country."

**Struggling against the odds**

Before a Native American woman is even born, statistics are stacked against her. At some point in her life, numbers say one in three Native women will be sexually harassed or assaulted - a rate 2.5 times greater than the overall population, according to a report compiled by the Indian Health Service.

And that's before she enters the military.

"Being a woman and being in the military is not like being a man and being in the military," said Amy Vannatter, the women veterans program manager at the Black Hills VA Center. Women not only have a higher chance of experiencing sexual trauma before serving, but also during, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

It is with this weight Native women enter the armed forces, where almost a quarter of all women experience sexual assault, and more than half encounter sexual harassment. When paired with the high probability that they've already experienced sexual trauma prior to enlisting, it bodes ill for many Native women.

"The double whammy for Native women is not only did they maybe see their buddy get blown up from an IED, but

# THEIR WORDS: WARRIOR PANEL

ON FEB. 18, 2009, **THREE NATIVE FEMALE VETERANS** TOOK QUESTIONS FROM STUDENT JOURNALISTS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND OTHERS ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND PERCEPTIONS OF **BEING A WOMAN WARRIOR**.

ONE OF THE RIGHTS THE WHITE BUFFALO CALF WOMAN BROUGHT IS FORGIVENESS. A LOT OF THESE THINGS THAT HAPPENED HISTORICALLY, WE DON'T DWELL ON IT.

-DARLA BLACK

MY PARENTS WERE COMPLETELY SUPPORTIVE. THEY SAW IT AS A WAY TO MOVE FORWARD, GET AN EDUCATION, HAVE A BETTER LIFE.

-LINDA ROBINSON

WHEN PEOPLE SAY IT'S HELL, IT REALLY IS.

-STACEY STABLER



I THINK IT (DISCRIMINATION) WAS NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE OF BEING A NATIVE AMERICAN, IT WAS BECAUSE OF BEING A WOMAN.

-DARLA BLACK

MY EXPERIENCE BEING IN THE MILITARY GAVE ME A LOT OF INNER STRENGTH.

-LINDA ROBINSON

WE DID THE EXACT SAME THING AS OUR MALE COUNTERPARTS.

-STACEY STABLER



# THE POWER OF POWWOWS

AMONG THE DRUMS AND DANCING, NATIVES AND NATIVE SOLDIERS FIND A COMMUNITY.

STORY BY KATIE STEARNS

they may have been sexually assaulted or harassed at the same time,” said Dr. Sally Weyer, who does outpatient treatment for veterans on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Beyond sexual harassment, some Native women found that simply being a woman discredited them in men’s eyes.

“The male soldiers did not want us there,” said Stabler, who enlisted in January 1994. “They made it plain and simple and told us, ‘Hey, you do not belong here.’ They did not help us. We had to help ourselves.”

The struggles don’t end as soon as a woman’s service or tour or basic training camp is over.

Stabler’s been in the Army for 15 years, and she hasn’t yet received an eagle feather from the Omaha Nation. The eagle feather is a grand symbolic gesture – recognition of a warrior who has sacrificed something to defend the people.

“Women don’t have the right to get one,” Stabler said. “It’s just something we don’t get.” She said that from a young age, the children in her tribe are taught to listen to the elders. And the elders say men are greater than women. She accepts this as it is, as it has always been.

“I don’t think we ever will be equivalent to the Native male,” she said. “I think we do come to terms with it, we do accept it. I don’t believe that we’ll ever see the day that the Native female will equal ... the Native male.”

## Continuing the battle at home

Lisa Jendry’s son was 6 years old when his mother sat him down to tell him she was leaving for Iraq. She tried to put it in terms Rickey, named after the grandfather he never met, could understand.

“I said there were a lot of children who needed help; they had some bad things happening there, and we had to go help them have a better life and keep them safe. And he seemed to really understand that.”

Understanding didn’t make goodbye any easier.

“It hurts when you give him that last hug and that last kiss. It’s unbelievably painful. I had to tell myself that I was doing something important. I was doing something for him. I couldn’t really think about the time frame; I had to kind of separate my mind from that.”

Not quite grasping the timeline of his mother’s service, Rickey often asked, “When are you gonna come home?” When

The powerful drums are no match for voices dominating a circular arena rimmed with spectators, some donning traditional garb, others there simply to watch.

“It’s our time and our space when we’re at a powwow,” said Sandy White Hawk, a Sicangu Lakota who found powwows later in life. She was adopted into a white missionary family when she was 18 months old but began attending powwows in 1988 after reconnecting with her family.

For her, a powwow was a place to reconnect to a culture from which she’d been severed.

“It’s everything Indian and about who we are. We don’t have to have our guard up,” said the 56-year-old woman.

Within the arena, a cluster of men pound the animal hide drums relentlessly in harmony. Then the singing begins, melodic notes and complementing the rhythm of the drums.

“Because the drum represents our heartbeat and who we are, and when you hear that, you can’t help but be settled and you just, I don’t know how to put it into words,” White Hawk said.

And it is to this marriage of voices and beats that the Native American men and women veterans, usually part of a color guard, enter the powwow arena. This is the Grand Entry – one portion of the overall ceremony but also the moment when elders, veterans and other respected guests step into the celebration.

For Jan Malcom, a 62-year-old Oneida and a Women’s Army Corp veteran, walking into the Grand Entry, side by side with other veterans, is humbling.

“It’s a real honor. Especially when other veterans join us because when we get done, we’ll post the flags and we’ll peel off one by one, and shake each other’s hands and just say, ‘Welcome home.’ It’s quite an honor to be carrying those flags in.”

Sprinkled throughout the powwow grounds are myriad dances, which can vary by region and the tribe. Some dances – like the Two-Step, Round Dance and the Gourd Dance – can transcend regions, sprouting all over the country.

Beyond these traditional dances and celebratory theme, a powwow is a chance for many Natives to find peace, a cultural healing of sorts.

“I hear the beat of the drum, straight down into my soul ... and it’s quite a healing experience,” Malcom said

Lisa Jendry, a 30-year-old Lakota Sioux, was given an eagle plume and the name Okicize Win, or “War Woman,” at the first powwow she attended after returning from Iraq.

“It’s really strong, especially when you’re out there in the middle and you have all these dancers around you and the drums, and they’re singing, especially if they’re singing a veteran song or a flag song or a song for soldiers,” she said.

When White Hawk was reuniting herself with her culture, she recalled an Indian woman who told her: Sandy, just go to powwows and don’t try to figure out everything all at once. Find the drums you like to listen to, and sit by them and just listen.

“For me, for someone who didn’t grow up hearing the drum, who didn’t grow up hearing the songs, didn’t grow up around that, powwows for me were really healing,” White Hawk said. 🌟

he asked his mom if she still loved him, Lisa knew she needed to come home.

And in the middle of July 2006, she did just that.

But for Jendry, like many women warriors coming home, transitioning was not easy. For the past year, bombs and blasts throughout the Green Zone had been her daily background noise and her nightly lullaby. She ventured into the Red Zone a handful of times, her protective gear on and weapons always ready to fire. Returning from Baghdad to Texas was tough, as it is for many women returning home.

"They aren't just being cooks. They aren't just being nurses," said Sherry Kloeckl, a case manager with the VA Black Hills for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. "They're being gunners. They're being drivers. Physically, they're carrying the same things the men are, and they're not physically as strong."

So when these Native women warriors come home, it's often a harsh transition.

"You do so much in the military. You're always going. You always have a purpose," Jendry said. "Your car's going really, really fast, and then you get out, and it's like a crash."

Consequently, PTSD, survivor's guilt and depression hit many Native women hard once they return.

"When they come back from serving, especially the new ones, they are expected to just fall back into place to what they were doing before," said Weyer, who's worked at the VA Black Hills since 2001. "And also that meant that their warrior status gets set aside, and they are expected to resume that nurturing, caring status that they had before."

And because women experience sexual harassment at a higher rate in the military, and Native women al-

ready have a greater chance of sexual harassment before serving, Native American women have an even higher chance of suffering from PTSD.

Other women don't even realize they're grappling with the mental illness.

Although Malcom returned from Belgium in 1968, it wasn't until 2004 that she realized she had PTSD.

"I started hearing the symptoms over and over again, and I thought, 'Oh, that's kind of what I live like,'" she said.

Through peer counseling, a therapist and a color guard, Malcom has found some peace. She now gets a monthly payment from the government to cover her PTSD.

## Back to normal

At the end of the day, each woman must find her own way to heal, to feel normal again.

"When I took my uniform off, it felt like I was taking off a part of my spirit – like my heart," Jendry said.

She also didn't feel at home in Houston. On a whim, she decided to move back to Rapid City, S.D., hoping to connect with her Lakota culture. ☺

**"THEY'RE BEING GUNNERS. THEY'RE BEING DRIVERS. PHYSICALLY, THEY'RE CARRYING THE SAME THINGS THE MEN ARE, AND THEY'RE NOT PHYSICALLY AS STRONG."**

—SHERRY KLOECKL  
VA BLACK HILLS CASE MANAGER



**LINDA ROBINSON** answers questions during a warrior panel. Robinson, of the Omaha Nation, served in the Women's Army Corps from 1968 to 1971. She was drawn to the armed forces because of her father's tales about in WWII. "I couldn't see why a Native woman couldn't do the same thing and serve her country." Photo by Clay Lomneth.



## NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN VETERANS

A SELECTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS FROM NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE MILITARY:



During WWI, 14 Native American women served as part of the Army Nurse Corps. Two of them went overseas, including **Charlotte Edith Anderson Monture** (left) of the Iroquois Nation. She left her job as an elementary school nurse to join in 1917 and was sent to a military hospital in France.



**Elva Tapedo Wale** (left), a Kiowa, along with almost 800 other Native American women, left her reservation to join the Women's Army Corps during WWII. As private Tapedo, she became an "Air WAC" and worked on Army Air Bases across the U.S.

During the Korean conflict, **Verna Fender** (right) joined the Navy and trained in Bainbridge, Md. She was sent to a Naval hospital after being severely injured during basic training. After recovery, she completed her three-year enlistment in San Diego, Calif.



**Pearl Ross** (right), an Arikara, joined the Air Force in 1953 to train as a medical specialist. Her second assignment was in Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. She tended to men wounded in combat theater. She was turned down as a volunteer for overseas duty in Vietnam.



SOURCE: WOMEN IN MILITARY SERVICE FOR AMERICA MEMORIAL FOUNDATION INC.  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

**"WHEN I TOOK MY UNIFORM OFF, IT FELT LIKE I WAS TAKING OFF A PART OF MY SPIRIT — LIKE MY HEART."**

—LISA JENDRY  
OGLALA LAKOTA ARMY VETERAN

Once there, Jendry got involved with a warrior society — the Wildhorse Butte Tokala Intertribal Color Guard. After members discovered she was an Iraq War veteran, they asked her to join so they could honor her warrior status and recognize what she had sacrificed.

"There's a recognition that these men and women who have gone off to war have experienced training to turn them from peaceful people into instruments of war — killing machines,"

Loew said. "It seemed to me that every Native community I encountered recognized that when these instruments of war came back into society that we, as a community, have an obligation to help them make that

transition from a person of war to a person of peace. "

### Moving on after battle

Today, Lisa Jendry devotes her time to color guard, powwows, her 9-year-old son and finally, getting an education.

As a full-time student at Black Hills State University, she attends class four nights a week. She'll have her degree in human services and a minor in Native American studies in 2012.

Lisa, who suffers from a traumatic brain injury and pelvic injury caused by her uneven legs, gets her tuition paid for under the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program. It also covers her books, school supplies and provides a stipend that allows her to be a full-time student.

When Rickey asks what his mom's studying or what she's reading, as he often does, Lisa makes a point not to

# POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

## FOUR PRIMARY SYMPTOMS

1.

### Intrusion

Recurrent recollections of the event:

dreams, intrusive memories and exaggerated emotional and physical reactions to events that remind person of trauma

2.

### Numbing

Emotional distance from people and events:

depression, loss of interest in activities, reduced ability to feel emotions (particularly emotions of intimacy, tenderness or sexuality), irritability, hopelessness

3.

### Avoidance

Fear and avoidance behavior:

fear and avoidance of people, places, thoughts, or activities associated with the trauma, development of anxiety disorders (GAD, panic, specific and social phobias)

4.

### Arousal

Agitated state of constant wakefulness and alertness:

hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating

SOURCE: THE TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, PENN MEDICINE  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

**Beatrice Coffey Thayer** (right) served in the Army Occupation in Germany. She recalls being assigned KP with German POWs accompanied by armed guards. She was there when the Berlin Wall went up. She stayed in the Army until the '70s.



An Oglala Sioux from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, **Ola Mildred Rexroat** (right) joined the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) right after high school. In Eagle Pass Army Air Base in Texas, she'd tow targets for aerial gunnery students.



With a family military background, **Darlene Yellowcloud** (left), Lakota, joined the Army. As a guidon carrier, she was hurt when another carrier pierced her foot with a guide iron. Now, she serves the Virginia Air National Guard.



Many Native American women have lost their lives for their country, including **Terri Ann Hagen** (left), an Army Medic for the Army National Guard. She died fighting a fire on Storm King Mountain in Colorado in 1994.

**“THERE’S A RECOGNITION THAT THESE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE GONE OFF TO WAR HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAINING TO TURN THEM FROM PEACEFUL PEOPLE INTO INSTRUMENTS OF WAR – KILLING MACHINES.”**

—PATTY LOEW  
OJIBWE DOCUMENTARY PRODUCER

shoo him away. She loves when their studies collide and brings him pamphlets and handouts from her college courses.

“Being able to say, ‘My mom’s going to college now,’ I think that’s a source of pride for him,” she said.

Once she gets her degree, she hopes to be there for other veterans like they were for her.

“We have this whole huge group of veterans coming back and will be for a long time, and we gotta make sure that they’re not being failed,” Lisa said. “That’s so important and so crucial that they get what they’re entitled to, that they don’t come back and feel like they’re not understood.”

Had she not joined the military, Lisa’s not sure she where she would’ve ended up.

“The military sort of forced me to do something with my life and not get caught up in the fact that he (her dad) had just died,” she said.

And if her father could see her now?

“He would be so proud,” she said. “I think about it a lot. Him and my son would be very, very close. I could see it now, they’d be fishing, they’d be doing everything together.” ☺



**LISA JENDRY AND SON** Rickey Jendry pose in November 2008, shortly after a feathering and naming ceremony honoring her service in the U.S. Army. Jendry was given the Lakota name Okicize Win, which translates to “War Woman.”  
*Courtesy of Lisa Jendry.*

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Stacy Stabler describes the Native tradition of prestige.



Stacy Stabler talks about the difference between getting a feather and getting feathered.



Links to more stories and numbers about warrior issues.







# IGNITING CONTROVERSY

As the Oglala Lakota tribe's first female president, **Cecelia Fire Thunder** faced harsh criticism. Whether she is called an advocate or a radical, it is impossible to deny her determination and clear vision.

Dozens of Oglala Lakota men stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the late 1800s. Many had no shirts. Several wore feather headdresses. Some of the youngest sat in a wagon, their faces fixed on a camera's still frame.

More than a century later, two women displayed the sepia photograph during a workshop on the Omaha Reservation. "Cecelia, don't you have something to say about this picture?" one presenter asked.

Cecelia Fire Thunder did have something to say and expressed herself first in Lakota. Then the first female president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe continued in English. She told the crowd to look at the men in the photo. All knew how to speak Lakota. All followed tribal customs. But none beat their wives.

STORY BY MOLLY YOUNG





domestic abuse wasn't part of traditional culture, Fire Thunder said, yet Indian women represent the most victimized group in the United States today.

"Somehow, I think deep inside of us, we have a huge desire to be Indian again," she said, adding later that people shouldn't rely on God alone to solve the matter. "She can't do it all by herself," she quipped, only half-joking.

It wasn't the first time the Lakota woman raised eyebrows. In fact, Fire Thunder apparently considers no topic forbidden. She's criticized Christians – Catholics especially – for introducing abuse into Native cultures. She's targeted South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds for his Christian-influenced stance on abortion. And she's

even challenged tribal elders for criticizing government affairs as she worked to erase her tribe's debt.

"She was willing to go forward and try to bring change to the reservation," said her niece Jennifer Bear Eagle, an attorney at the Omaha law office of Fredericks Peebles & Morgan. "Cecelia is not afraid to shake things up."

### A firm stance on a shaky issue

Critics call her a radical. Supporters call her an advocate. But Fire Thunder prefers a different term: leader. But one of her controversial plans would lead to her impeachment from the Oglala Sioux Tribe's top post.



## CECELIA FIRE THUNDER

does the traditional tremolo as she greets the riders of the Four Directions arriving at the Little Wound Kyle School. The Four Directions are represented by yellow, white, black and red and are derived from White Buffalo Calf Woman, who is known to have given them to the Lakota. Photo by Dick Kettlewell, Rapid City Journal.



In May 2006, on the heels of a state legislative bill that prohibited abortions, she announced plans to build a women's clinic. On her own land. On the reservation. Outside state jurisdiction.

"I was going, 'Wait a minute, we know that rape and incest occur – how do we allow white men to tell me what to do with my little brown body?'" Fire Thunder told Indian Country Today. "It was just intuitive as a woman to speak up. I shook the tree of denial on the Pine Ridge Reservation and now everyone is talking about it."

In the meantime, Fire Thunder accused state government officials of allowing their Christian beliefs to infringe upon the rights of Native women.

"For Lakota women it is a new day – we will take back our power to self-determination, will take a stand, will stand strong and will continue to make these sacred choices impacting our lives of future generations," Fire Thunder wrote in an April letter addressed to the Yale Law School

Sacred Choices, fittingly, would be the name of the new clinic. The plans divided the reservation, where six charges were brought before the tribal council in June. Among other things, council members accused Fire Thunder of using her presidency to leverage support and gain media attention.

Eighteen months after she entered office, Cecelia Fire Thunder was impeached on June 29, 2006. She appealed the decision to the tribe's highest court, but her impeachment was made final a month later. The clinic was never built.

## The bumpy road to election

Fire Thunder had devoted her career to women's rights, first in Los Angeles and then on the reservation, where she was born in 1946. She spoke no English until she was 5, when she was made to speak the language while attending Catholic boarding school. Fire Thunder contends schools like hers stripped cultural values and instilled abusive practices instead.

"So where did we learn violence?" she asked during the Macy workshop. "At the hands of a priest, at the hands of a nun."

Fire Thunder – and generations of Native children like her – witnessed violence at school, not at home. Today, she educates tribes about domestic violence and advocates using traditional customs and practices to find solutions. "What is our expertise?" she asked during the Omaha Reservation workshop. "Our culture and our language."

The Lakota woman spent 23 years living away from the center of her language and culture. At 16, her family moved to Los Angeles as part of a federal relocation program that sent Native families to live and work in distant urban areas. She married, had two sons, worked as a nurse and established a nurses' union.

In 1986, Fire Thunder knew it was "time to come home," where she helped establish Cangleska, a shelter for abused women. After twice running unsuccessfully for tribal president, Fire Thunder filed for election again in 2004. The campaign pitted her against Russell Means, an actor and a vocal member of the American Indian Movement. Means won the tribe's October primary election by a 300-vote margin.

During the next month, Fire Thunder traveled to the reservation's nine districts and campaigned on a platform of accountability. She promised to restore confidence in the tribal council while ending the tribe's financial challenges. But the election ran along gender lines, according to some election observers.

"She was going against the perception that women were not supposed to be leaders," said Jomay Steen, a Rapid City Journal reporter who covered Fire Thunder's tenure.

That perception fell silent Nov. 2, 2004, when Fire Thunder

# AT ISSUE

## FIRE THUNDER'S TAKE ON BANNING ABORTION

When South Dakota's abortion ban first passed in March 2006, Cecelia Fire Thunder became one of the measure's strongest opponents. "I have very strong opinions of what happened. These are a bunch of white guys determining what a woman should do to her body," Fire Thunder told Indian Country Today. "When a woman is raped and becomes pregnant, she does not have the choice of aborting. How many men at the statehouse have ever been raped?"



# ABORTION CONFLICT

Cecelia Fire Thunder fought to bring a women's clinic to Pine Ridge, but she faced great opposition. Here is a look at the evolution of the abortion debate:

**FEBRUARY  
22, 2006**

The South Dakota legislature passes an act banning abortions. The act doesn't apply to reservations.

Fire Thunder announces plans to bring a clinic that would provide abortions to Pine Ridge Reservation.

**MARCH  
21, 2006**

**MAY  
31, 2006**

The Oglala Sioux tribal council issues a ban on abortions on tribal land, and Fire Thunder is suspended from office.

Fire Thunder is impeached on six charges, most notably that the organization of the clinic was outside her duties as president.

**JUNE  
29, 2006**

GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

defeated Means by more than 600 votes, garnering 56 percent of the votes cast. That day, Fire Thunder became the tribe's first female president.

"Culturally, women are extremely sacred and respected," Bear Eagle said. "And women have a lot of strength. That's not to say men don't. I know that there are a lot of tribes that have never had a female president. Maybe we needed a change."

And Fire Thunder was willing to lead that movement. On Dec. 11, 2004, hundreds of people gathered for her inauguration in her hometown of Kyle. Among the attendees were Winona LaDuke, an Anishinaabeg environmentalist, and Wilma Mankiller, the former principal chief of Oklahoma's Cherokee Nation and a friend of the newly elected president.

"Leadership in our community is not for the faint-hearted," Mankiller told the crowd. "It's not for anyone who always wants people to like them. Leadership is for those willing to stay focused and stay strong."

Fire Thunder fit this description, Mankiller said. "I don't think the people elected her because she's a woman. I think they elected her because they believe in her ability to lead and know that she gets up every single day, says a prayer in her own language and goes out to fight for her people."

## Challenging tradition

During her first months in office, Fire Thunder attempted to fulfill her campaign promises to mitigate the tribe's debts, some of which dated to 1997. "She was dealing with a bankrupt government," Steen, the Journal reporter, said. "She was trying to find ways to work that out."

So Fire Thunder and a tribal council delegation sought outside help from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, a Minnesota tribe that had profited greatly

from casino investments. The tribe agreed to loan the Oglala Sioux Tribe nearly \$38 million to be repaid over 15 years. The tribe would make its payments using casino profits and tribal land lease fees. The tribal council decided to move forward on the agreement.

The move shocked many, including tribal elders who opposed using the tribe's land as collateral. In turn, Fire Thunder accused the elders of jeopardizing the well-being of their people, according to the Rapid City Journal. During a KILI radio program that spring, she addressed those elders, who she felt had never supported or claimed the tribal government.

"I want to know, what the hell are you doing meddling in politics?" Fire Thunder asked.

This wasn't the first time tribal elders grew angry at Fire Thunder, who conducted modern, business-like council, Steen said. Traditionally, tribal members, especially elders, could speak at length about issues. But Fire Thunder often cut elders short.

"That was horrific," Steen said. "You don't treat elders that way."

Soon, another complaint surfaced about Fire Thunder's administration. The tribe's constitution gives the tribal council the power to suspend or impeach the official. Though the tribal council chose not to suspend Fire Thunder then, more complaints emerged in October 2005. This time, the council immediately suspended the president.

Fire Thunder believed the accusations had more to do with her gender than her actions, but others blamed typically fickle tribal politics. "Every tribal administration has people who are not satisfied," said Vi Waln, a former Lakota Country Times reporter

**"LEADERSHIP IN OUR  
COMMUNITY IS NOT FOR THE  
FAINT-HEARTED."**

— WILMA MANKILLER  
FORMER PRINCIPAL CHIEF  
OKLAHOMA'S CHEROKEE NATION







based on the nearby Rosebud Reservation. “It doesn’t matter whether it’s a man or a woman.”

Her suspension ended 66 days later, following a daylong impeachment hearing in January 2006. But tribal council members began distancing themselves from Fire Thunder and impeached her six months later, following South Dakota’s abortion controversy. She filed for re-election and placed third in the primary.

Still, she continues to lead her tribe and

others in the fight against domestic violence. In fact, Fire Thunder spoke against violence at the 2009 Black Hills Powwow. Fire Thunder asked all the men who don’t drink, swear or beat their wives to stand up. Few men stood. She told the rest to be ready to stand next year.

It took courage to suggest that in front of thousands of people, Fire Thunder said, recalling the story a few weeks later. “Well, when God is on your side, you can do anything. Hallelujah, amen.” ☺

**CECELIA FIRE THUNDER**, seated left front, answers questions from the press in Rapid City, S.D. The former first female president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe had many supporters but also faced much opposition during her time in office. She hoped to one day open a women’s clinic called Sacred Choices. “For Lakota women it is a new day – we will take back our power to self-determination, will take a stand and will continue to make these sacred choices impacting the lives of future generations,” Fire Thunder wrote. *Photo by Don Polovich, Rapid City Journal.*

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Teens talk about their leadership aspirations.



Links to more photos and numbers about leadership issues.





# TAKING CHARGE

Though their voices have long been silenced by male-dominated hierarchy, Native females are choosing to speak up and stand out, breaking the bonds of tradition and taking control of their people's future.

STORY BY **MOLLY YOUNG**  
PHOTOS BY **CLAY LOMNETH**





**LAKOTA BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS**

pose for a portrait in front of Santee Normal Training School. *Nebraska State Historical Society.*

As leader of a Great Lakes Tribe, Tacumwah's responsibilities were two-fold. She managed daily village life, like all chiefs. But unlike men, Tacumwah ensured that moccasins were sewn and feasts were prepared – responsibilities borne by her gender.

The daughter of a Miami tribal chief and a Mohican woman, Tacumwah inherited her post. Later, she became a respected Myaamia leader in her own right.

In Miami tribal society, women's leadership was respected, as it was in many tribes' histories. But centuries of Euro-American ideas dramatically altered that tradition, as settlers imposed male-dominated practices on Native American societies. Rations, reservations and relocations acted as agents of assimilation, marking U.S.-Indian relations for more than 200 years.

"It was basically the policy of the federal government that 'you're either going to become like us, or we're going to kill you,'" said Carol Rempp, a Lakota woman who coordinates Nebraska's K-12 multicultural education programs.

These stifling policies stalled women's leadership until the second half of the 20th century, when educated and vocal Native women began asserting traditional roles. Today, their voices continue to grow stronger, as leaders like Wilma Mankiller, former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, and Theresa Two Bulls, current president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, shape politics in Indian Country and mainstream society.

It's a complex story shaped by hundreds of years, and it's told by the actions of:

- Past leaders whose lives reveal the traditional roles of women
- Respected elders who serve as inspiration for their people
- Modern leaders who push for greater sovereignty
- Prudent educators who recognize the importance



**Q&A**

**CAROL REMPP**  
MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**What exactly do you all day at Nebraska's education department?**

"I plan curriculum development options for teachers throughout the state, throughout the year, that are very specific to cultural competence and Native American issues. Right now I'm using popular culture to teach traditional culture. I'm using Sherman Alexie paired with Ella Deloria."

of learning

- Future leaders who envision the potential of Indian Country

And it's hoped that together, these voices can help solve the multitude of challenges Native Americans face today.

"Indian people have a lot of problems, and those problems aren't going away," said Mika Leonard, granddaughter of Floyd Leonard, a noted chief of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma who died in 2008.

The younger Leonard, who graduated recently from Miami University, works at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She plans to pursue a career in politics, advocating for Native people. Leonard said she knows it's important for women to lead.

Important, because women earned 60 percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded to Native Americans in 2007 – a rate that's remained steady the past 10 years.

Important, because one in 11 Native women operated her own business in 2004, the highest rate of entrepreneurship among all U.S. women, according to the National Women's Business Council.

Important, because Native women have always been leaders, said Vi Waln, a Sicangu Lakota and the editor of Lakota Country Times, the newspaper that serves South Dakota's Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations.

"Women are the backbone of society culturally, economically and in all ways," Waln said.

## Stripped of status generations ago

Hundreds of years ago, oral histories passed from one generation to the next and preserved those roles. So, too, did colonial documents. Both show women's leadership roles varied by nation and region.

In the Northeast, for example, women from the Six Nations Confederacy – the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora – participated in village decisions and nominated the confederacy's 50 chiefs. The confederacy's constitution, which governed tribes' rights, granted women ownership of land.

This constitution, and the political structure it was founded upon, inspired writers of the U.S. Constitution. In fact, the unity among the confederacy's members astounded Benjamin Franklin, so much so that he noted their accomplishments in a personal letter. The confederacy's organization, he noted, served as an

example for the new nation he was helping to found.

"It would be a very strange thing if Six Nations of Ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union and be able to execute it in such a manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble, and yet a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies," Franklin wrote in 1751.

Half a continent away, in the Great Plains, Lakota women's societies counseled tribal governments before decisions were made that affected the tribe's well-being. In the Southwest, Tewa women and men in the San Juan Pueblo were regarded as co-equals. And women in some Pueblo communities owned horses, regarded as some of the tribe's most important resources.

Meanwhile, the Navajo, Cherokee and many other tribal societies were matrilineal, tracing ancestry and inheriting status and wealth through mothers. That pattern helped guarantee women high regard, some Native American scholars argue.

Those scholars say this changed fundamentally with the arrival of European settlers. Two theories help explain why, said Martha McCollough, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln anthropology professor and

**"WOMEN ARE THE BACKBONE OF SOCIETY CULTURALLY, ECONOMICALLY AND IN ALL WAYS."**

-VI WALN

EDITOR, LAKOTA COUNTRY TIMES



### **PAWNEE WOMEN**

build framework for a lodge.  
*Western History Collections.*





Taken by the  
Commissary of  
Indian Affairs  
1887

**RESIDENTS**  
**OF** Wounded  
Knee, S.D., wait  
in a ration line.  
*Nebraska State  
Historical Society.*

former chair of the school's Native American studies department.

The first, McCollough said, claims that French, British, Dutch and Spanish traders refused to accept the legitimacy of women's power and property rights.

"The colonialists would not deal with female leaders," she said.

The second theory maintains that as warfare intensified between tribes and colonists, some tribal societies became more patrilineal, shifting resources from women to men.

The gender gap widened between 1850 and 1887, when most tribes moved to reservations, often a result of force and coercion by the U.S. government. On those reservations, federal agents dealt with "heads-of-families," leaders they often assumed were men, McCullough said. Consequently, men distributed government-issued rations among family members. When the federal government began dividing tribal land into individual allotments in 1887, after the passage of the Dawes Act, land parcels were most often granted to these heads-of-families.

Another late-1800s federal policy affected both men and women: the education of Indian children in off-reservation boarding schools, where they were taught Western skills, customs and language. Consequently, generations of children lost the guidance of their mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers. And many lost their language, culture and identity.

# Q&A

**THERESA TWO BULLS**  
OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE PRESIDENT



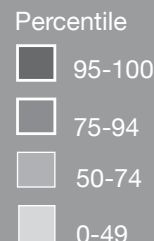
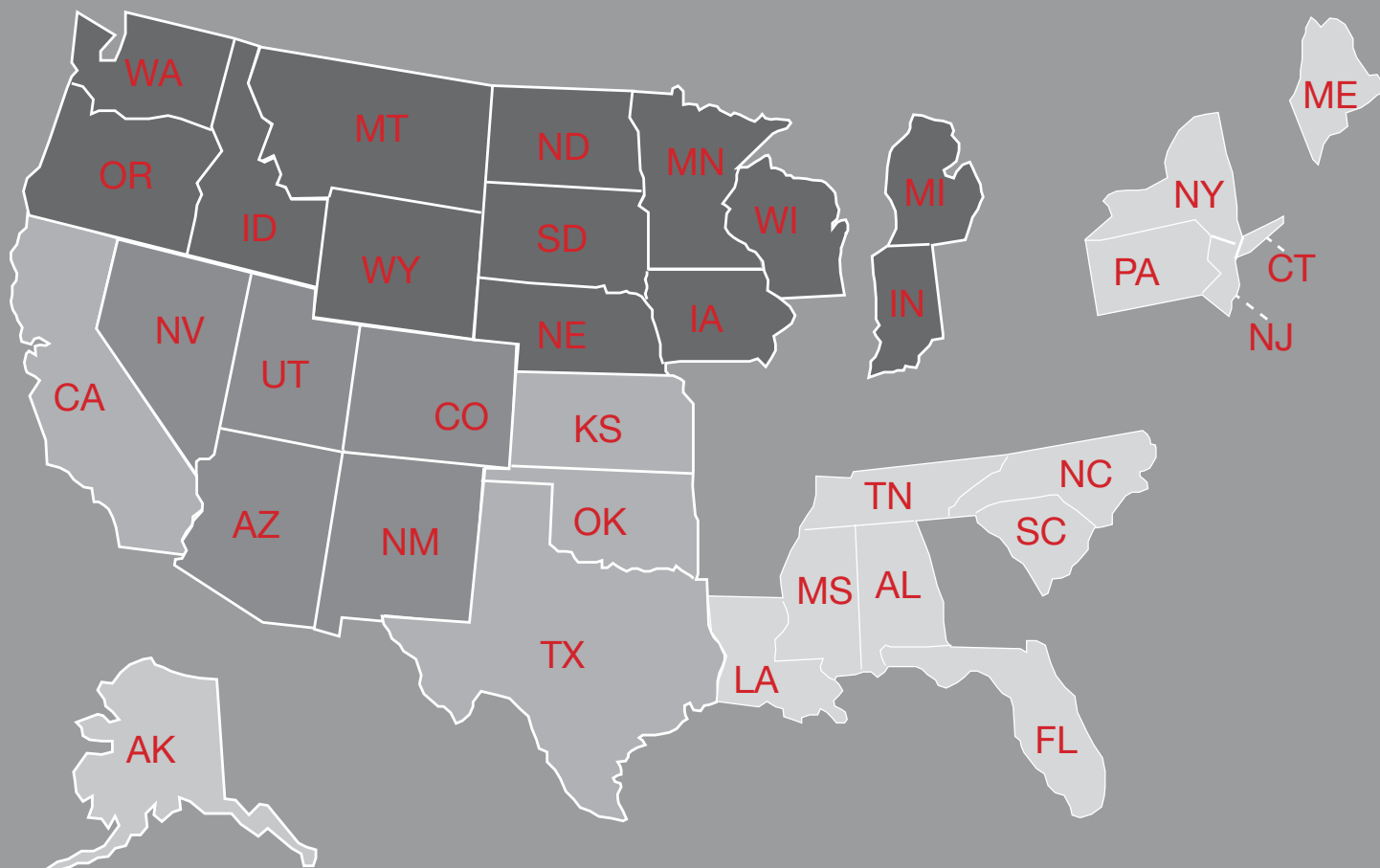
On Dec. 5, 2008, Theresa Two Bulls became the second female elected president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Two Bulls secured more than 350 signatures on her presidency election petition. She couldn't believe she had gained so many voices of support. "There's several times I had to pinch myself to say, 'Is this real?'" Two Bulls said.

## Restoring Native women's rights

It's hard to explain the respect Native American cultures afford elders within the contexts of mainstream society, in which the word "elderly" denotes a sort of weakness. That's not so among many tribes, where elders are often included among tribes' most respected members.

As a child growing up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Tina Merdianian promised her grandmother she would share their people's culture and beauty, which she heard about in her grandma's stories.

"Grandparents raising you is a very special connection," said Merdianian, a Lakota woman who



# NATIVE SUICIDES

HERE ARE THE NATIVE SUICIDE RATES FOR INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES AREAS. IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST AND MIDWEST, THE STATES ARE IN THE HIGHEST PERCENTILE OF SUICIDES:

SOURCE: CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

directs institutional relations at Red Cloud Indian School.

In Native households, elders often play an integral role in raising grandkids. Seven percent of Native American grandparents lived with their grandchildren in 2004, more than twice the rate of the total U.S. population. In addition, nearly 60 percent of those Native grandparents were at least partly responsible for their grandchildren's care.

Often some of the best educators in reservation schools are elders who speak directly to children and pass on tribal customs and knowledge.

Philomine Lakota, an Oglala Lakota elder and Red Cloud instructor, teaches her native language to high school students and works to restore her tribe's rites of passage for young women. The sacred rites help prepare girls for "every shock in life," she said.

The chairperson of the Oglala Sioux Tribe is committed to restoring those traditions. That chairperson is a woman: Theresa Two Bulls. In November 2008, she became the second female president in the tribe's history.

"We need to become the strong nation that we were before," Two Bulls said. "There were hundreds of thousands of us, and yet they lived a good life."

**"WE JUST CAN'T AFFORD TO BE MEEK AND MILD ANYMORE."**

-GLENNA WALLACE  
CHIEF, EASTERN SHAWNEE TRIBE

## The rise of women in tribal leadership

Across the U.S., Native American female leaders like President Two Bulls, Chief Glenna Wallace and Chairwoman Janice Mabee challenge daily the "good ol' boys" system that has long defined many tribal governments, where men have held the highest positions of power.

"Because of Native American cultural tendencies, there are some men who believe, almost like a biblical verse, that women should just be silent," said Wallace, who was elected chief of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma in 2006 after serving on the tribal business council for 20 years. "Then there are some who say, 'I never thought women should be chiefs, but you changed my mind.'"



# A CHAMPION FOR EDUCATION

DR. CASSANDRA MANUELITO-KERKVLJET ENCOURAGES NATIVE STUDENTS TO ADD THE 'WEAPON' OF KNOWLEDGE TO THEIR ARSENAL.

STORY BY MOLLY YOUNG

**T**wo years ago, a Navajo medicine man's convocation prayers confirmed a new leader at a Seattle university. Those at the ceremony received a cedar blessing, while traditional chants punctuated the processional and recessional.

By afternoon's end, Antioch University's newest president had introduced the college to her way of leading. Dr. Cassandra Manuelito-Kerkvliet blends mainstream methods with those of her people, the Diné, a tribe of more than 250,000 people who comprise the Navajo Nation.

"I talk to the institution as a community, as a family, as a village," said Dr. Cassandra Manuelito-Kerkvliet, Diné.

On that fall day in 2007, Antioch's leader became the first Native American female president of a university outside the tribal college system. Administrators chose Manuelito-Kerkvliet from a pool of more than 40 candidates to lead Antioch University Seattle, a liberal arts college with an enrollment of about 800 students.

"I hate to be identified as 'the first,'" said Manuelito-Kerkvliet, who has spent her entire career in higher education. "I don't like the phrase myself because it does say we haven't come far enough."

Like many Native American students, Manuelito-Kerkvliet spent her college days far from family with students who neither looked like her nor understood her struggles. But Manuelito-Kerkvliet chose persistence, not pity, she said, and eventually earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Wyoming. She then went on to counsel students at Oregon, New Mexico and Wyoming universities and served as the president of Diné College, the Navajo tribal college system, from 2000 to 2003. Two years later, she earned her doctorate's degree from the University of Oregon. Today, Manuelito-Kerkvliet advocates that young Natives develop a future force of leaders to lead the nation. And she knows how: through education.

Another Diné leader first advocated the path more than 100 years ago. That man was Chief Manuelito, the university

**DR. CASSANDRA MANUELITO-KERKVLJET** during her installation ceremony as president of Antioch University-Seattle in 2007. *Courtesy of Antioch University-Seattle.* (Far right) Chief Manuelito.



president's great-great grandfather. Born in 1818, Manuelito became a respected war chief during the decades-long struggle against Mexican and later U.S. forces.

Much of the fighting ended with the Long Walk in 1864, when the Navajo were forced to walk more than 300 miles to the Bosque Redondo, a dry, desolate area of southeast New Mexico. Two hundred people died on the journey. They remained in the camp for four years. Conditions were dire: Estimates show 2,500 Navajos died between



1864 and 1868.

To end the suffering, Manuelito and other tribal leaders traveled to Washington and signed the Treaty of Bosque Redondo in 1868. Among other things, the treaty established the boundaries of the Navajo Reservation within parts of present-day northern Arizona and New Mexico and southern Colorado. The Diné returned to their homeland, Dinétah, though its size had been greatly reduced by the treaty. The Navajo Nation today encompasses 26,000 square miles, making it the nation's largest reservation.

In addition, the 1868 agreement guaranteed education for Navajo children, and Manuelito grew convinced this would be the ladder to his people's future. Today, the Navajo Nation sponsors a college scholarship in his name.

"I just really believe, like he did, that education is going to be our modern-day weapon," Manuelito-Kerkvliet said.

Students must use that "weapon" today, she said. Individual commitment will create a future generation of Natives prepared to accept the nation's top posts, said Manuelito-Kerkvliet, reflecting her great-great-grandfather's belief.

"The Indian community — we're going to come out on top," she said, "if we recognize the importance of education." 🍌

# FEDERAL POLICIES

For more than 200 years, federal policies have governed U.S.-Indian relations. Together those policies helped shape Indian Country today.

## 1850-1887 Reservations

The federal government sought to "civilize the natives" by forcing tribes to move to reservation, first by entering into treaties. In 1871, the U.S. stopped signing treaties with foreign nations and began creating reservations through statutes and executive orders.

## 1887 Allotment

The Dawes Act, better known as the General Allotment Act, divided tribal land into individual allotments. To teach Natives how to become "good citizens," the federal government planned to hold the land in trust for 25 years. Non-Native settlers purchased leftover reservation land, creating a "checkerboard effect" on reservations that still exist today.

## 1894-1953 Reorganization

The government moved tribes toward self-determination. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 allowed tribes to create their own governments modeled after Western political customs. In addition, the act stopped allotment practices and held all land in trust indefinitely.

## 1953-1968 Termination and Relocation

The federal government moved to sever the ward-guardian relationship between the U.S. and tribes that had existed since 1831. They also began federal relocation programs, encouraging Native families to move urban areas.

SOURCE: "AMERICAN INDIAN LAW IN A NUTSHELL" BY WILLIAM C. CANBY, JR.  
GRAPHIC BY LIZ GAMEZ

Wallace was among the 131 women listed on the National Congress of American Indians tribal leader registry in January 2009. Together, these women lead nearly one-quarter of the nation's 562 federally recognized tribes. A majority of those leaders are concentrated in two states: 57 in Alaska and 34 in California. Four more women guide state-recognized tribes in Connecticut, North Carolina and Louisiana.

Women, Wallace said, must be at the forefront of tribal leadership today.

"Females in almost every culture, simply from statistics, have a longer role, a greater role, in taking care of the next generation," she said. "We just can't afford to be meek and mild anymore."

Chairwoman Mabee of the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe agreed. One of four female

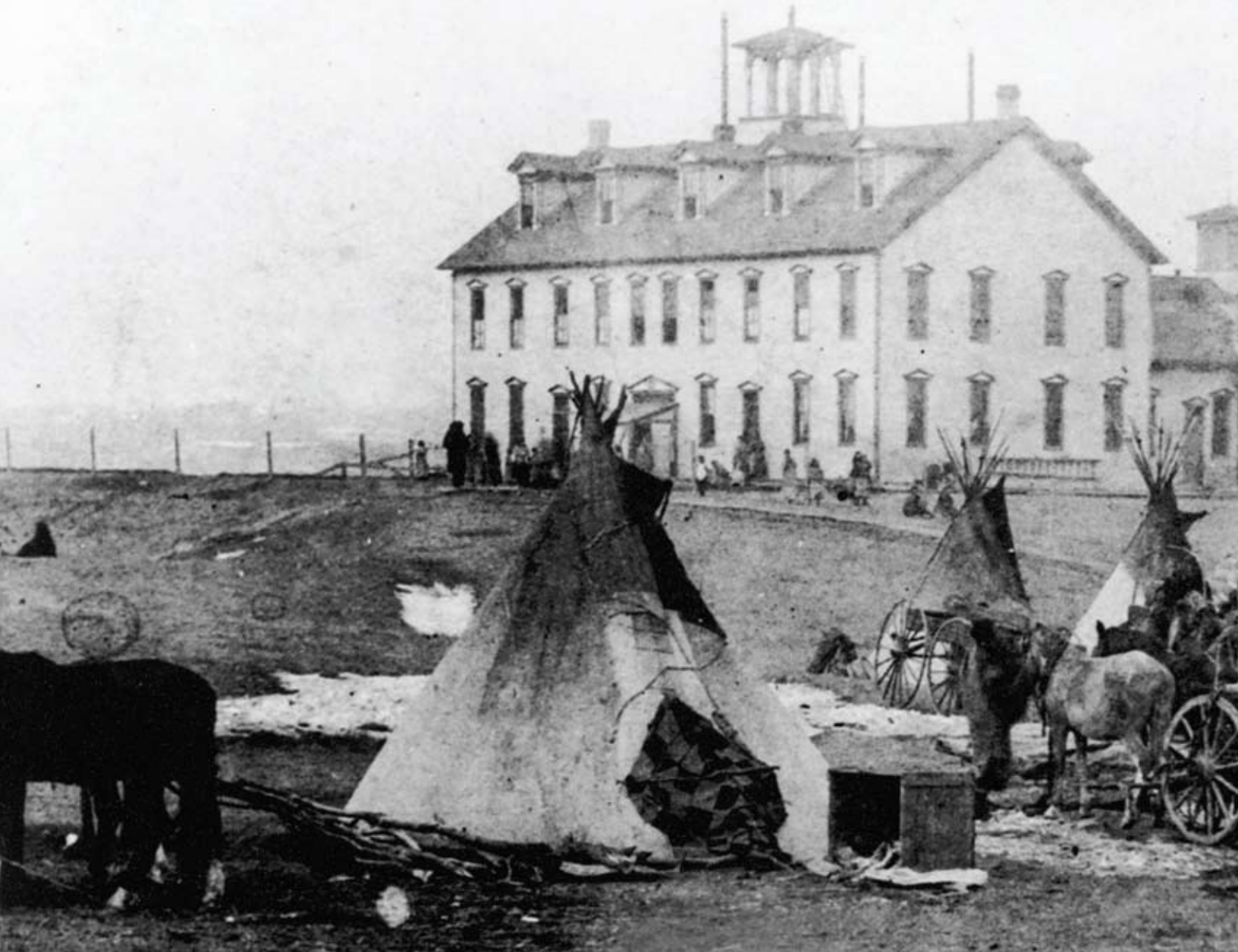
leaders among Washington's 29 tribes, Mabee didn't know if she could help her tribe but knew she had to try.

"I told my husband that if I become chairman, I will no longer have my own life," she said. "I will belong to the tribe. He said, 'That's what being a leader is: belonging to the tribe.'"

Under Mabee's leadership, the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe has developed an economic board to help promote stability and to employ members in the tribally owned smoke shop and delicatessen.

Judi gaiashkibos serves as the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs executive director, a post she has held since 1995. In her state and elsewhere, the Ponca woman said, Native issues have been far from the top of government agendas for a long time.





**MISSION SCHOOL**  
on the Pine Ridge  
Reservation near  
Wounded Knee,  
S.D. Nebraska  
State Historical  
Society.

“Historically, tribes have always been an afterthought,” gaiashkibos said.

But today, an increasing number of Native women are speaking for their people from within state and federal governments. In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed two leaders to positions never before held by Native American women. Jodi Archambault Gillete, a Standing Rock Sioux tribal member, became the deputy associate director of the president’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, a Lakota woman from the Rosebud Indian Reservation, became the first female director of the Indian Health Service.

The two leaders illustrate how Native women can make a difference on the national platform, said Waln, the South Dakota newspaper editor.

“It’s really important for us to see them in those positions,” Waln said. “We can move up the ladder. We can hold those positions of power in Washington.”

But Native women must climb the ladder’s first rung: education.

### Striving to beat the statistics

“We can get through poverty by education,” said Victoria Sherman, principal of Pine Ridge Schools. “We can get through alcohol and drug issues.”

The principal, an Oglala Lakota, knows how difficult obtaining an education is. She attended 13 schools before graduating from high school. Later, as a reservation teacher and administrator, Sherman was reminded all too often of the struggle: In the past 10 years, she has buried 25 students, many to suicide.

“As a leader, you just have to keep telling people, ‘We can do this,’” Sherman said.

And for Native American children – boys and girls – something must be done, leaders say. Native and Hispanic students on and off reservations share the country’s highest high school dropout rate: 12 percent in 2007, according to the 2009 Kids Count Data Book, an annual report published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. That rate stood at 22 percent in 1997.

Native teens alone hold the nation’s highest death rate; 95 of every 100,000 Native American teenagers between 15 and 19 died in 2006, the latest year data was available from the Casey Foundation. Six years earlier, in 2000, 88 of every 100,000 Native teenagers died.

Some Native students live in the country’s most economically impoverished conditions, too. Thirty-one percent of Native American children from birth to 19 lived in poverty in 2008, nearly twice the rate of the overall U.S. population.

But Sherman and other educators agree that perseverance on their part – and on the part of their



students – will produce a future generation of leaders.

“We tend to baby our kids because they have hard lives,” Sherman said. “These bad things happen to us, but they don’t have to control us.”

Rempp, a multicultural educator, said teachers and administrators should integrate cultural practices into classrooms to accommodate students and prepare them for high school and college.

“It used to be that to provide for your family, you needed to be a good hunter,” she said. “You still need to be a good hunter, but not a good buffalo hunter, but a good hunter in finding a career path so you can take care of your family.”

## Female leaders have faith in the future

Not only can educated women take care of their families; the next generation of female leaders can solve the problems Indian Country faces today, Sherman said.

“Today, our Native American women, their opportunities are unlimited,” she said.

As a whole, the Native American population is relatively young, with a median age of 31.9 years, compared to non-Hispanic whites, whose median age is 40.1 years, according to the 2004 U.S. Census

Bureau statistics.

For some, positive signs mark the road to the future.

For example, the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development honored the top 40 Natives under the age of 40 in September 2009. Half of those honored were women, including a lawyer, a college adviser and a fashion designer.

In fact, entrepreneurship among Native American women is growing at a faster rate than any other ethnic population. Native American women owned more than 90,000 businesses five years ago, employing nearly 129,000 people and generating \$12.4 billion in sales.

In addition, the number of Native American women who earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees has outpaced men 3 to 2 during the past 10 years, according to the Department of Education.

Nakina Mills is one of those graduates. The Pine Ridge native received her bachelor’s degree from Creighton University before returning home to coordinate her tribe’s child welfare program.

Progress in Indian communities, Mills said, must start with improving children’s lives.

“It’s coming, it’s just not going to happen overnight,” she said. “You’ve got to have hope. You’ve got to have hope that there’s better things out there.”

**ON THE WEB**  
nativedaughters.org



Theresa Two Bulls didn’t want to go to college. Her mother pushed her onto the bus – the best thing she could have done for her.



Nakina Mills talks about the importance of culture and the old native traditions.



Links to more stories and numbers on Native women leaders.



# MACY

## DAUGHTERS



Name: **Kyra Miller**

Age: 14

Tribe: Omaha

Last movie that made me cry: "The Village" (I was scared)

Favorite food: Pizza

What I do for fun: Play basketball with friends

What keeps me up at night: My cell phone

What I am looking forward to: College

Name: **Sonya Resendiz**

Age: 18

Tribe: Omaha

Last movie that made me cry: "Cast Away"

Favorite food: Tacos

What I do for fun: Play basketball and play with my son

What keeps me up at night: My son

What I am looking forward to: A good career

Many **Omaha Nation** teen girls wish they could find more to do than walk or drive in circles in Macy, Neb., but they dream about much bigger things, too.

**STORY BY MOLLY YOUNG**  
**PHOTOS BY CLAY LOMNETH**



**Name:** Lucy Dale  
**Age:** 17  
**Tribe:** Omaha  
**Last movie that made me cry:** "What's Eating Gilbert Grape?"  
**Favorite food:** Pizza  
**What I do for fun:** Write, talk with friends, walk around  
**What keeps me up at night:** Nothing  
**What I am looking forward to:** Graduating and going to college

**Name:** Natasha Tyndall  
**Age:** 17  
**Tribe:** Omaha  
**Last movie that made me cry:** "Marley and Me"  
**Favorite food:** Fried rice  
**What I do for fun:** Walk around with my friends, write poems  
**What keeps me up at night:** My baby puppy, TV  
**What I am looking forward to:** Graduation, college







kye Parker's tough, can't wait to get out of high school and can stop everything in a room by cracking her knuckles. But she's 14 years old, and the movie "The Notebook" makes her cry.

"I want my life different than what it is now," she says. "Because I don't like the way I'm living my life right now. So I'm going to try to change it."

Ebony Hutchinson is a 15-year-old mom, and she wants to be reunited with her own mother.

"I want to be with my mom," she says.

Kyra Miller, the bigtime basketball scorer, doesn't want anything. Maybe new shoes.

Nearly all the girls at Omaha Nation High School – Um On Hon High School – agreed that there's not much to do in Macy. But tonight, that's different.

Elsie Clark who directs the Omaha Nation Critical Response Team, arranged tonight's hand game – to raise awareness about domestic violence. She looks around while recorded drum music drowns the gym. She knows the women. She knows the men.

The game should have started 30 minutes ago. Yet Macy's community building sits nearly empty. But Clark knows it will start soon enough.

One by one, family by family, the community fills the risers. The drum group makes its way toward the center. The game begins.

And continues late into the October night.

But that's not unusual in Macy, Neb., where people meet for hand games and basketball games, gourd dances and school dances. It's the tiny town where little girls play outside of the tribal council building after school. Around the corner, two teens hold hands. Three others smoke and gossip nearby. Another group walks toward the gas station while the school bus drives past the hospital and police station on its way out of town.

Skye Parker wants her life different.

"I'll try my best," she says. "It's just that I kind of do a lot of bad things and it's getting in my way. And I need to straighten up, but I can't. So, it's hard in Macy." ↻

**Name:** Skye Parker

**Age:** 14

**Tribe:** Omaha

**Last movie that made me cry:** "The Notebook"

**Favorite food:** Chinese, nachos, Indian tacos

**What I do for fun:** Walk around with my friends and play volleyball

**What keeps me up at night:** Talking on my phone

**What I am looking forward to:** Getting out of high school



**Name:** Faith Lyons

**Age:** 17

**Tribe:** Omaha

**Last movie that made me cry:** "Australia"

**Favorite food:** Indian tacos, nachos

**What I do for fun:** Read, write, hang out with friends, walk around, drive around, sleep, dream

**What keeps me up at night:** All of my dreams, what I want to be in my future

**What I am looking forward to:** Succeeding in life, fulfilling all of my dreams or goals I set out for myself



**Name:** Lauren K. Sherman

**Age:** 17

**Tribe:** Omaha

**Favorite food:** Pizza

**What I do for fun:** Go see my best friend

**What keeps me up at night:** Things that I want to do in my life

**What I am looking forward to:** Finish school and go to the army and doing everything I want in life



**Name:** Ebony Hutchinson

**Age:** 15

**Tribe:** Omaha/Cheyenne/Arapaho

**Favorite food:** Ribs

**What I do for fun:** Hang out with friends and my daughter

**What I am looking forward to:** Going to college



**NATIVE DAUGHTERS**

Name *Kayla R. Parker*

Age *17*

Tribal affiliation

*Omaha  
Tribe*

Last movie that made me cry

*Along ~~with~~ Road*

My favorite food

*Italian Food.*

What I do for fun

*Playball - basketball  
Run & help out when  
its needed the most*

What keeps me up at night

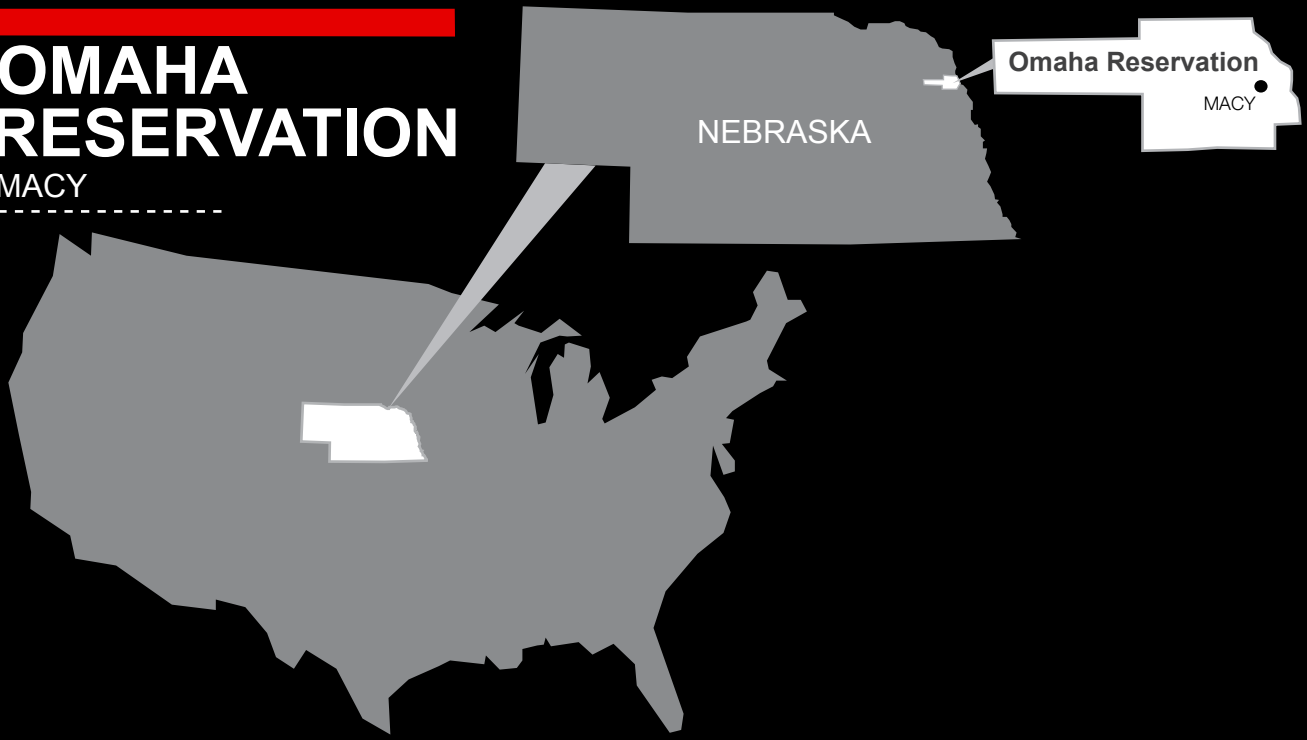
*Doing my work  
when it needs to be done.*

What I am looking forward to

*Finishing High School  
going to college  
& making a difference*

**OMAHA  
RESERVATION**

MACY



**ON THE WEB**  
nativedaughters.org



See the girls answer the questions of what's on their minds and What they want.



See in-depth interviews with the girls, who talk about their dreams for after high school.



See more photos of more Macy girls from the Omaha Nation High School.



Name: **Alyssa Rouillard**

Age: 14

Tribe: Santee

Last movie that made me cry: "Lovely Bones"

Favorite food: Chinese

What I do for fun: Computer, read!

What keeps me up at night: My phone, my twin!

What I am looking forward to: Well, this summer (I'm going) to Germany ...  
YAY! And probably college

Name: **Miranda Sheridan**

Age: 14

Tribe: Santee

Last movie that made me cry: "Lovely Bones"

Favorite food: Pizza

What I do for fun: Get on my laptop and surf MySpace

What keeps me up at night: Texting and Internet

What I am looking forward to: Getting good grades and going to college!



# SANTEE

## DAUGHTERS

**Name: Bianca L. White**

**Age: 15**

**Tribe: Isanti Dakota/Oglala Lakota**

**Last movie that made me cry: "Marley and Me"**

**Favorite food: Chinese**

**What I do for fun:** Spend time with my family, go to Yankton and play with my siblings

**What keeps me up at night:** Thinking about my life

**What I am looking forward to:** Graduating high school and going to college

**Name: Anabel Rouillard**

**Age: 14**

**Tribe: Santee**

**Last movie that made me cry:** A Holocaust movie, forgot what it was called.

**Favorite food:** I gotta say pizza or pickles

**What I do for fun:** I probably just play around on my phone and get on the computer to go to MySpace and stuff. Maybe go to the Teen Center and play the PS3 or Xbox360 or something like that

**What keeps me up at night:** Things that happened that day...



On the border between South Dakota and Nebraska, along the jagged banks of the Missouri River, the girls of Santee feel isolated from the world they long to join, but Chinese food in Yankton and family will do for now.

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY MATT BUXTON**



**J**ordon Whipple walks down quiet roads on the Santee Reservation with her friends after school. Sometimes classmates walk ahead in the distance, turning the curve to come into town. Even though the roads seem to stretch forever, they don't seem to lead anywhere. Or maybe they lead to another reservation where another group of girls are walking to nowhere. Or maybe they lead to cities with strip malls, universities and white people with their lack of understanding and alien ways and experiences. Some people Jordan knows have traveled down those roads, some for longer, extended stints to get degrees or just to have adventures, others just for Chinese food over in Yankton, S.D., with their grandmas, but it seems that everyone comes back to the rez sooner or later.

Jordon gossips with her friends as they walk home, which is a place that's always changing, depending on which family member is taking her in at the moment. She smiles her bright, troublemaker smile. They talk about "teenage girl drama." Boys, music, clothes, sports and - when they feel brave - their dreams.

Sometimes, a packed car cruises by and someone, some upperclassman, shouts an insult that's just meant to be mean. Jordan coolly, almost naturally, shouts back at the car. She's not smiling anymore.

She's tough as hell. Tougher than most freshman girls in America. Tougher than most non-rez people ever dream of being. People called her tough when she stole her auntie's car with a girlfriend and drove two hours to Macy, to another rez, to see a boy. The cops had to bring her home. She smiled her bright, troublemaker smile when she recalled that weekend. She caught hell for running away, her auntie refusing to talk to her for months, but her mom didn't say much, and her dad's never around and doesn't even know about it. Something in her smile says she might do it again. For longer and further this time.

When she's brave enough to talk about her future, she talks about going to college in Miami to become a nurse and returning to heal her broken family. She's seen enough of her friends and family – people Jordan thinks of as tougher than herself – lose sight of their dreams to know this won't be easy. The odds are against her, but she sets her jaw tight and looks down the road that winds through the hills of Santee, past the houses and the gas station, past the other girls and the suicides among her friends and family, past it all and to what lies just past the horizon.

Now, she's not smiling. Her friends have already moved past the catcalls and are talking about cute boys or cell phones. Tears well in Jordan's eyes and she sets her jaw tight.

"I want to get out of here," she finally says. ☹️

**Name:** Jordan Renae Whipple

**Age:** 16

**Tribe:** Santee

**Last movie that made me cry:** "Titanic"

**Favorite food:** Pizza

**What I do for fun:** Hang out with family and friends

**What keeps me up at night:** My cell phone and me wishing my family could get back together

**What I am looking forward to:** Going to college and being a nurse



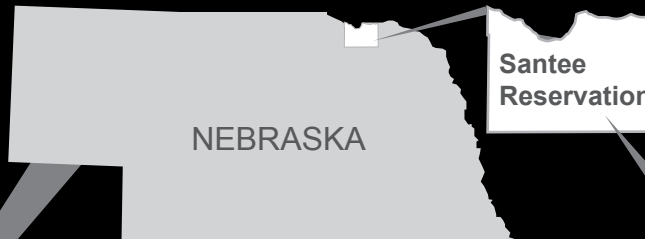




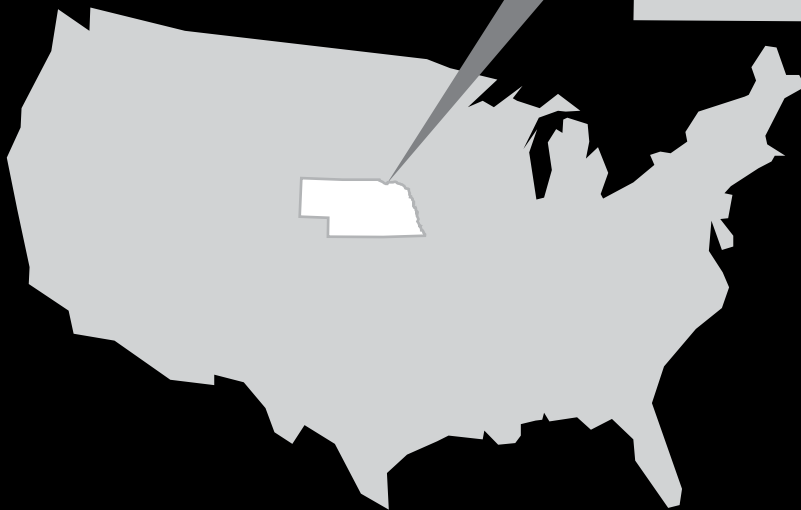
**ALYSSA ROUILLARD** (left) and Miranda Sheridan, both 14-year-old freshmen, discuss homework in their English classroom at Santee high school. (Below) State Spur 54D connects Santee to the rest of the world. *Photos by Matt Buxton.*

## SANTEE RESERVATION

LOCATOR MAP



Santee Reservation



**ON THE WEB**  
[natedaughters.org](http://natedaughters.org)



Interview the girls on your own terms by choosing questions to ask them.



See raw footage of the girls discussing their hopes, dreams and typical days.



Read more about them in their own words, both hand-written short answers and typed essays.





# ON THE WEB

natedaughters.org

**NATIVE DAUGHTERS**  
past. present. future.

**Native Daughters is...**  
Native Daughters is a collection of stories, profiles and multimedia about a diverse group of Native American women. They are healers and warriors, story tellers and law makers, leaders, environmentalists and artists. It is our intention that these stories are just a starting point to learn about Native American women and we hope women across the country will join in and share their voice.

**BE A PART OF NATIVE DAUGHTERS**  
Submit your writing, videos or other work here and help us expand what it means to be a Native American woman

Native Daughters examines the role that American Indian women have traditionally played in native history and culture. This publication views their traditional role through seven windows – political leaders, environmentalists, healers, law-givers, artists, storytellers and warriors. Each of these seven windows has a past, present and future component. If you dig into this material, for example, you'll learn the role of a traditional medicine woman 200 years ago, but also learn how a

## NEWEST STORIES

Our most compelling stories will keep changing on the main site as Native Daughters keep making news.

## MULTIMEDIA BAR

See videos from documentary students, photos that didn't appear in this magazine and much more.

## YOUR STORIES

Are you a **Native Daughter**? Then you can give us your story through words, photos or video. Better yet, all three.

ALSO  
ONLINE



## VIDEO FOR EACH STORY

See short clips and extended raw footage of **Native Daughters** from profiles and depth stories. For example, see Rose Mesteth make fun of a "typical white guy" for thinking in white terms. Or see Winona LaDuke rail against corporate America.

**ON THE WEB**  
natedaughters.org



Audio sound bytes of **Native Daughters** expanding on the main points they made in their stories.

All content from **Native Daughters** is adapted for Web consumption, and better yet, we have added Web content, including videos, interactive interviews and photo slide shows.



### INTIMATE PORTRAITS

View environmental portraits, read handwritten autobiographies and peruse likes and dislikes from teens.

### PHOTO SLIDE SHOWS

Find extra photos not in the magazine and listen to audio slide shows, such as one from a girls basketball game.

### INTERACTIVE INTERVIEWS

You can interview each of our teens in the FUTURES section, choosing which questions to ask them.

### BEHIND THE STORY

See videos of reporters talking about their failures and triumphs in reporting **Native Daughters** stories. For pretty much all of them, this depth-reporting experience was both daunting and rewarding and the toughest project they've ever attacked.

### CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Soon, we'll work with Native American educators to build lesson plans and other educational materials.



Intro videos to profile stories in each theme, such as Valerie Red-Horse's Hollywood saga.



Links to more stories all over the Web on **Native Daughters** and their issues.



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**JAMIE LEE**, Oglala Lakota College teacher and author

**TINA MERDANIAN**, director of institutional relations, Red Cloud Indian School

**NAKINA MILLS**, Pine Ridge counselor

**WILL NORTON JR.**, former Dean of University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications; current Dean of the Meek School of Journalism and New Media, University of Mississippi

**OMAHA TRIBAL COUNCIL**, Omaha Tribe of Nebraska

**JOHN PENN**, Executive Director-Omaha Nation Community Response Team

**VALERIE RED-HORSE**, filmmaker and entrepreneur

**SHERRI SCHOENFELDER**, guidance counselor, Omaha Nation School

**VICTORIA SHERMAN**, principal, Pine Ridge High School

**JOHN SINGER**, girls basketball coach, Walthill High School

**VICTORIA SMITH**, associate professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of History

**VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE**, **native** author

**RYAN SODERLIN**, photo editor, Rapid City Journal and graduate of University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**ALICE SANS SOUCI**, Nebraska Indian Community College

**STACEY STABLER**, Army veteran

**VIDA STABLER**, teacher, Omaha Nation School

**JAMES STUBBENDIECK**, director of the Center for Great Plains Studies

**SRIYANI TIDBALL**, advertising lecturer, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**TERESA TWO BULLS**, president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe

**ALEX WHITE PLUME**, Lakota environmental activist

**VENETIA WOLFE**, Omaha Housing Department





A nation isn't conquered  
until the hearts of its  
women lay on the ground.

-NORTHERN CHEYENNE PROVERB



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