



# SHEDDING SKINS

FOUR SIOUX POETS

TREVINO L. BRINGS PLENTY  
STEVE PACHECO

JOEL WATERS  
LUKE WARM WATER

EDITED BY ADRIAN C. LOUIS



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# SHEDDING SKINS



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FOUR SIOUX POETS

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*Trevino L. Brings Plenty*

*Steve Pacheco*

*Joel Waters*

*Luke Warm Water*

*Edited by Adrian C. Louis*

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## *Introduction*

*Adrian C. Louis*

### THE END OF THE TRAIL IS A BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL

I wasn't some troll caged by  
the gravity of a dank bridge,  
but I was compressed under  
the arc of a whitening sky  
when I heard them whisper.

“We like him somewhat.  
He knows to fart precisely  
the moment the saddle rises.”

The dumb bastards did not  
know I always rode bareback  
& spoke their secret tongue.  
I'd loitered in their mother's  
womb, had suckled her books  
in her oak-leathered rooms.

My haggard horse hung low  
his head, his neck my pillow  
& his back was my bed.  
“Fine,” they said. “Sleep  
deep & bring us a dream.”

So we did & we were running  
in shimmering delight, delirious

in the strength of our youth.  
 Our fertile flanks foamed in  
 the sunlight & our hooves did  
 not skitter when we hit rocks.  
 Past the stones & onto sand,  
 we whirled, dashed around  
 & over rabbit brush & sage  
 & heard voices that seemed to  
 come from the whitening sky.  
 “You bring us a dream. You  
 & not that goddamned nag.”

They did not know the horse  
 & I were one blood, one bone.  
 Such purchase was beyond  
 their deep pockets so we ran  
 & ran like a son of a bitch  
 until the sky reddened &  
 we stalled in a sentence  
 of sweat & self-love.

Sometimes I wonder which carriers of Native culture are the most important. That culture itself is not a static commodity, that it is a constantly evolving creature is often not factored into the public equation. Some people think those Indians who adopt a public persona—the artists, the writers, the actors, the historians, the educators, etc.—provide the greater sustenance of tribal ways. Others say the grassroots people, the less formally educated singers, medicine people, story tellers, and community activists are more important.

In this anthology of four Sioux poets, I think you will find a combination of the two. And while I know that the term “Sioux” is rapidly falling out of favor with those it is applied to, I used the word because of the mixture of tribes involved. Two of the writers, Joel Waters and Kurt Schweigman (who chooses to write under the

name Luke Warm Water) are Oglala Lakota. Trevino Brings Plenty is Minneconjou Lakota, and Steve Pacheco is Mdewakanton Dakota. And they all are male. Perhaps someone soon will do a compilation of women poets of the Great Sioux Nation.

On the surface, the subject matter of the poems may seem extremely similar, but with a careful reading each individual poet becomes his own planet, his own galaxy. While each evokes stinging traces of the hardships of reservation life on the northern plains, each paints his own portrait of what it means to be a Sioux Indian in these times and survive. Joel Waters and Steve Pacheco tend to have more of an academic influence in their work. Warm Water and Brings Plenty have cut their teeth in the field of Slam and performance poetry. Waters is finishing up his degree at the University of South Dakota. Pacheco completed his MFA in creative writing at the University of Minnesota and now teaches high school. Brings Plenty now lives in Portland, Oregon, where he is a musician in addition to being a writer. Warm Water works in the American Indian public health field and recently moved from Rapid City, South Dakota, to California.

The poems in *Shedding Skins* cut to the bone with their honesty, and we live in an age where honesty is an orphan. But these four poets offer brilliant and insightful portrayals of Native pain, hope, joy, and overall, survival. In the flickering neon of these poems, you can smell the commodities cooking; you can hear the old ones singing. Many of the poems in this collection make the leap from the common/mundane to the truly visionary, and this allows the reader a rare taste of epiphany. These four young Skins frequently take a local starting point and transform it into a universal truth. Let them take you into their worlds. Finally, I need to thank my friend the poet Wang Ping for the cover photo of the medicine wheel which is not a medicine wheel at all but art work on an ancient gate in China. Peace out.





TREVINO L. BRINGS PLENTY



## *Here We Go Again*

I sat in a chair  
in Lucy's new apartment.  
Another lady was there  
who I never met.

She introduced herself and said  
her name was Alicia.  
She sat at my feet facing me.  
She had blue eyes, auburn hair, fake 'n bake skin.  
She asked if I was Native American.  
I said, "Yes."  
"Native Americans are so cool," she said.  
"They are very spiritual.  
They are in touch with the earth,  
and, oh my god, there is the Great Spirit.  
You have a beautiful culture."  
"It's not all mine," I said.  
"Native Americans have so much wisdom,"  
she said and leaned closer to me.  
"Do you know any sacred stories?  
Can you tell me a story?"

"Okay," I said.  
"This one took place in old times.  
There was a lone cavalry soldier.  
He was stationed at an abandoned  
fort in South Dakota.  
There were Lakotas not far off.  
The Lakotas watched this man  
and wondered at his strangeness.  
They saw him cleaning the fort.  
They thought he was crazy to be alone.

Then they saw him trying to communicate  
with a wolf that had white front paws.”

Alicia interrupted me and said,  
“That is the storyline for  
*Dances with Wolves.*”

“Yes it is,” I said.

Then Alicia stood behind me  
and started to run her fingers  
through my hair.

“It’s unfair,” she said,

“Indian men have such beautiful hair.

It’s so dark and thick and soft.

You are a beautiful man.”

“Thanks,” I said, “But you know  
I have more of that beautiful hair  
around my cock.”

Alicia quickly pulled her hand away.

“You’re disgusting!” she screamed.

“Maybe so,” I said, “But your ideas  
of me are just as repulsive.”

Then Alicia sat on my lap and kissed my cheek.  
She stood and left the apartment.

“There you go, Trevino,” Lucy said,

“You have a great way with the ladies.”

“Yeah, I know,” I said, “The crazy ones  
come to me like flies to dog shit.”

## *Ghost Shirt Litany*

I wear her dead father's shirts  
which are heavier than muslin shrouds.  
He is in the ground  
from an overdose  
and I sit on green grass  
thinking which kind of  
bugs are crawling through  
his bones.

I wear these shirts  
every day.  
They are worn out.  
Some with cigarette holes,  
some with puke stains,  
some too warm for summer.

All these shirts  
in my closet,  
all these nights  
I pass out on the couch,  
and wake before the starlings.

I am caged in these clothes,  
in this red world,  
in this destruction,  
in these ghost shirts.

## *How to Be an Indian Male in the Early 21st Century*

6



S H E D D I N G   S K I N S

You must be birthed from an Indian mother.  
She must be in her teens.  
She must come from an alcoholic lineage.  
And you must say this is so.

You will never meet your father.  
You will grow uncertain about your manhood.  
You will be angry.  
This must be so.

You will sit in a cafeteria,  
greasy fries and cheeseburger before you.  
You will know all these people  
are all different ideas.  
All these people will never leave.

A bearded white man sitting twenty feet away  
will look you over.  
He will wonder at your cheekbones,  
your long hair in a ponytail,  
your dark brown skin.  
He will want to ask what tribe you are.

He will feel sorry for you  
and your people's history.  
He will imagine you half naked  
like what he saw on TV last night  
and what he has read in his large  
Western novel collection.

He will hate you  
because you don't fit his model.

You will see this bearded white man.  
You know he is watching you.  
You will imagine him in the same  
period clothes as he was with you.

You will feel sorry for him.  
You will sip your water in a clear plastic cup.  
You will imagine the bearded white man  
wearing buckled shoes, tan stockings, knickers, puffy shirt,  
vest, topcoat, and a large-brim hat.

You will wonder when his glory days  
ever began. You know he smells foul.  
The white man has maybe bathed once a year.  
This was the strange custom of white people.  
You will start to mimic the way he is eating  
and sound out the strange nuances of his language.  
It will anger you when you look around  
the cafeteria and see mostly white people.

The white woman five feet away wearing a yellow dress  
and dipping bread into her soup will see you.  
She will want to take home a dark man.  
She will hate you  
because her husband is white.  
Her life is easy,  
it has to be.  
She has two white children.  
She will leave this family.  
She will use you.  
She will break your heart.

But she doesn't do this to hurt you;  
she does this to leave her unhappy marriage.

You see this white woman in a yellow dress.  
Her wedding ring is very expensive.  
You imagine her wearing a low-cut red dress.  
You imagine her leaving her family.  
She must be unhappy with her life.  
You know she is watching you.  
You know you must end her marriage.  
You will be in your late thirties.  
The anger you had all your life  
will eat you alive.  
You will drink heavily.  
You will not care  
when your mother calls long-distance.  
You will let your answering machine pick her up.

You will die from a fatal injury.  
This must be so, but not until diabetes sets  
in your body and most of your sight is gone.  
You will be a dead Indian male underground.  
All the noise you had in your head  
will finally be silenced.

This could be one end to your story.

## *To Rid the Egg*

It wasn't long ago  
third world reservations  
destroyed hope  
in the newest generation's possibilities.

In the '70s  
my mother was damn lucky  
she was not  
sterilized by IHS butchers.

My mother,  
a brown woman,  
birthing U.S. enemies;

brown children  
that grew up  
in urban California.

Here I am  
years later  
waking to new information  
on the death of my genes,  
death of my land.

Making it out  
of the doubt  
I had in my facial structure

I say now it was luck,  
but really it was  
survival. empty space

My mother saving  
her grace in the children  
she nourished  
while piecing together  
who she was  
in a manifest destiny world.

Mothers are creators  
of what we are;  
part history,  
part failure,  
part discovery,  
part resolution,  
all fire.

Indian women  
birth those who will  
demolish  
this monster  
that controls all.

This machine  
created  
to liquidate  
brown people.

In the U.S.  
my mother survived  
sterilization empty space  
by empty space  
secret legislature, empty space.

## *The Question*

We lived in San Jose, CA  
on welfare, commodities, WIC.  
Found broken toys and ill-fitted clothes  
at a Goodwill drop-off.  
I attended mostly all white schools.  
I hated my coarse black hair,  
my large cheekbones, brown skin,  
and very Indian sounding name.  
We lived off of the city,  
ate \$1.50 tacos with diet soda,  
and on weekends with family,  
partied until early morning crying fits.  
My mother's mother drank herself to death.  
My mother's father chose homelessness  
and pushed a shopping cart.  
My uncles would sit in a back room  
cooking up heroin or hubba rocks.  
Indians in a city, that's what we were,  
powwows in college gyms,  
moving every year into different motels  
or cheap rooming houses by railroad tracks  
kept warm by open oven heat.  
TV, public transit, white families  
every year giving us used board games, clothes, food  
while me and my siblings hid in a closet,  
watching them wanting to help an Indian family  
not struggle.  
To be Indian is not to be a savior for white people.  
To be Indian in a city is not tragic.  
And now you ask me where I am from.  
I understand your question,

but will answer it with, “Next question.”

Alive in America is all we are.

Let’s leave it at that.

## *No Eyes*

1.

My grandfather had his eyes stolen.  
He said they were  
in a Smithsonian Museum.  
The last image he saw  
was a blond-haired woman  
bending over him.  
He was newly back from Japan,  
he was still wearing his WWII uniform.  
He said it wasn't a good thing,  
but he was sadly satisfied his eyes  
were set next to his grandparents' bones.

2.

My grandfather was a brakeman  
in his late teens.  
When he lost his left pinkie finger,  
he quit and joined the army.  
“There were a lot of Indians  
in the army,” he said,  
“We were seen as American heroes  
when we wore our uniforms.”  
He said,  
“Know this, grandson,  
the people were not all warriors.  
My cousin was a painter and storyteller,  
my brother was a fisherman,  
my sister tamed horses,  
everyone ate food, breathed air, drank water.  
This is the family lineage.”  
My grandfather rolled a cigarette.  
He was wearing sunglasses.

It was evening just before supper.  
“Every man wants to huff and puff  
their warrioriness,” he said,  
“But the real work is peace.”

## *To Find the Indian Wisdom*

She is a lingerie model.

She has orgasms for money.

I am Native American, an Indian, to be precise.

Sex for money, this keeps our rent and food going.

She thought because I am Indian,

I come with extra knowledge/wisdom.

She wants me to be the earth she walks,

this is not how it is.

I am a man who is not earth.

I am a man who is in need as anybody else.

I accept her work and that is all.

To her, I am well-grounded,

not that I have feelings, in fact

there is no feeling when the job is sex.

I am dead and I am dead.

I am a man, but really another consumer.

We all fool ourselves with love.

I hate her for what she does,

but she pays the rent and keeps me alive.

Besides, what's the point of living anyways,

to be hollow in what I believe and want day and night?

NO. KEEP SELF ALIVE ONLY.

THERE IS NOTHING ELSE.

I am an idea, she is a woman,

both don't work when money is exchanged.

After our last fight,

I kicked her out the door

and threw five dollars at her.

She was worth her full pay

and I gave it to her.

She is gone and I am alive.

What more can you ask.

## *Park Sandwich*

I sleep in a park across from a church,  
the San Francisco sun on my face.  
I vomit on the grass.  
I load my bags over my shoulder.  
I don't need anything else.  
My feet hurt from  
walking around town,  
and a good drink will be great.  
The church is handing out  
a PB&J sandwich, chips, a can of soda.  
I eat this down,  
drink the soda with  
an Indian woman with wild hair.  
She smells like she is packed  
full of cum and shit.  
She asks if I want some company,  
she will do me good.  
I think hard about this,  
and say no.  
My cock is sore  
from too much masturbation  
with cheap lotion,  
so much so that my right palm  
is just as chapped as my cock.  
She says she is Spokane Indian,  
her name is Charmaine Elixer.  
I say to her I'm visiting from Portland, OR.  
She pulls from her pack  
some sweet grass and  
gives it to me.  
I light it and cover  
my face with smoke and throw it.

“What you do that for?” she asks.  
“I don’t need all that shit,” I say.  
She kicks my shin  
and picks up the burning strand  
and covers my feet and body with smoke.  
“Brother, stay strong,” she says,  
“I can tell you got something  
good about you.  
I love you.”  
“You don’t know me.”  
“How did you feel when I said it? Good, huh.”  
“Good ain’t great and great ain’t good.”  
“You are a smart fucker, enit.”  
“I know some things.”  
“Stay strong, brother,  
we are Indian and  
have inherited the earth.  
Our lost white brothers and  
sisters have destroyed us and built  
this shitty city.”  
“It was bound to happen  
sooner or later.”  
“Stay strong.  
Take care.”  
She walks out of the park  
and into the void of the city.  
I feel holy and American.  
I take a bottle from my pack,  
take a pull,  
stand and walk into the same void.

## *Building Rooms to Sell Dreams*

I sit on brick steps  
after work with my homeless  
friend, Red.  
He said he woke this morning  
to rain hitting his face.  
He was dreaming of his mother  
beating him with a plastic  
slot car racetrack.  
Each hit across his body  
was the love he hadn't known,  
the truest sense of safety lashing him.  
He dreamed of his uncle  
holding him down, face buried  
in the thick, carpeted floor.  
Naked and cold,  
the lights on in the living room,  
the TV showing rap videos,  
his uncle said he would kill him  
if he told anyone.  
Each thrust Red received  
was someone taking an interest  
in his life, it was lovemaking  
to an Indian boy and Red  
closed his eyes from then on.

I smoke a cigarette and  
take a pull on my beer.  
"Those are only dreams, Red," I said.  
He said, "I don't dream anymore,  
I only remember."

*Part Gravel, Part Water, All Indian*

It's not by accident  
I live in a city.

It was calculated:  
a bloodline of misery,

a nonwhite skin,  
a tongue not made for English,

years to germinate genocidal loss.  
I live to wait as anybody else

not for handouts,  
but hand-me-down lives:

work boots, white T-shirts, blue jeans.  
I am the Other of this

American Other masked in common clothes.  
My homeland is occupied by debt.

My language is not in my dreams.  
My heart is ripped to shreds.

My lungs burn with fire/smoke.  
My body is diseased by civilization.

My mind is a nomadic madness.  
I live where concrete sterilizes life.

*Life Money*

“Fuck you!” the young, white guy yelled  
into the hot mid-afternoon air  
while walking past me.  
I was smoking a cigarette  
at the entrance of a natural food store  
across the street from a pawn shop.

What the hell is this?  
I thought, blowing out smoke  
and making a fist.  
I looked down at my only weapon;  
an acoustic guitar in a hard-shell case.

The white guy was with  
two white girls and another white guy.  
They were crossing the street  
when a mumbled, “Fuck you”  
in response came from around the corner.  
Then the white guy yelled again,  
“‘Fuck you?’ Took you long enough!”  
and continued to walk away, laughing.

I knew it was a homeless drunk that mumbled.  
I didn’t want it to be,  
but when I looked around the corner,  
two Indian guys,  
my age, sat on the sidewalk.  
They were bumming change,  
wasted out of their minds.  
They were cursing  
at the white gang.

I pulled hard at my smoke  
and felt like kicking the shit  
out of every white male I saw.  
I pulled hard again and  
walked to the Indian guys.  
“Hey, where you from?” one of them asked.  
“I’m a Lakota from South Dakota,” I answered.  
“Hey, brother,” the other guy said,  
“I know you don’t like seeing us like this.”  
“Shit, man,” I said, “You are still a skin.”  
I dug deep into my pockets and gave them  
my change. I rolled them two cigarettes each.  
“Thanks,” they said in unison.  
I saw it in their eyes,  
those Indian eyes in love with drinking.  
“Take care,” I said and walked  
to the pawn shop across the street.  
I had to make rent this month.  
I live paycheck to paycheck.  
I could easily be homeless.  
My grandfather was homeless.  
Shit, I am in a city  
miles from my homeland.  
Damn near homeless.

I love to drink and  
I’ve seen it in my eyes  
many times, many nights.  
A dangerous love  
made mad of this world.  
And an unbearably white thing  
yelling at me,  
“FUCK YOU!”

*Lakota Language Lesson with Benjamin*

I sit at the kitchen table  
with my grandfather.  
We are learning the Lakota language.  
We listen to a cassette recording  
he made three years ago.

We sound out the strange words together.  
We say the words for  
all my relations, good,  
woman, horse, cat, dog, home.

All those drinking years he had—  
I remember them all.  
His marriage, years as a chief  
in the Marines, no-good alcoholic children,  
grandchildren's birthdays, his youngest brother  
who drowned, the remaining brother who died  
two years ago, his ex-wife who died last year.  
My grandfather can't recall any of these.

A brain blood clot pressed down  
and crushed his memory.  
A year after surgery he has regained  
his motor functions and speech.

My grandfather and I take a break  
from our language lesson.  
I make him a ham and cheese  
sandwich on 12-grain wheat bread.  
I place it on a plate  
with a handful of baked potato chips.  
I set the plate in front of him

and he says, "Thank you, sir."  
I open a can of diet cola and  
pour it into a plastic cup with ice.  
I drink from the can and set  
the cup next to his plate.  
He says, "Thank you, sir."  
"Lala," I say, "We are doing good, enit."  
He says, "Wast'e."

It was dusk when my grandfather  
and his two younger brothers  
were drinking near the Cheyenne River.  
The youngest wanted to swim across  
the river. My two grandfathers  
drove in a pickup truck over a bridge  
and parked on the other side.  
My grandfathers watched their youngest  
brother sink in the middle of the river.  
They couldn't do anything about it.

"Lala," I say. "I think we are doing good, enit."  
My grandfather smiles and says, "Wast'e,"  
and takes a bite from his sandwich and eats  
a couple of chips. He asks for a straw,  
I get one, and place it in his cup.

In the mornings I dress my grandfather in  
blue jeans and a western shirt. He slips on  
his white tube socks and brown cowboy boots.  
He stands before a mirror and combs thinning hair.  
"Phoebe," I say to him. "That was your wife's name."  
"Phoebe," he says, "that's a funny name."

“Major and Abraham,” I say to him.

“Those were your brothers.”

“Yes,” he says, “Major and Abraham.”

Before his surgery my grandfather talked at me  
in the Lakota language, point blank.

When I was younger, I asked him at a powwow  
if the Lakota drum group sang any words.

My grandfather laughed at this and said, “Yes, *Takoja*.”

Three years ago I remember my grandfather sitting  
at the kitchen table with a tape recorder in front of him.

He said he was making these tapes for his grandchildren.

When I’m away from my grandfather he asks my wife  
where that nice man went, not remembering that

I am his grandson. My wife says, “He went to school.”

“When is he coming back?” he asks.

“Soon,” she says. She says, “Soon.”

I press play on the cassette player after my grandfather  
finishes his meal. We sound out more Lakota words.

As we sit at the table, he says,

“My voice sounds funny on that machine.”

I say, “The language sounds funny, enit.”

He says, “The words feel like home.”

I say to him, “I think we are doing good, *Lala*.”

My grandfather looks at me and says,

“*Wast’e, Takoja*. We are doing good.”

## *Meals*

Mine is a red owl  
asleep in the day  
and hunting in the night.

I keep it well fed  
lest it claw my lungs,  
tear my kidneys.

Most of the time  
it is calm,  
beautifully perched  
in my chest.

But sometimes, it  
turns its body,  
opens its wings,  
and flies into the dark.

Then I am alone  
looking for purpose,  
finding the sadness  
of my hands  
touching my face,  
combing my hair,  
tending old wounds.

When the owl returns,  
I keep it awake  
out of anger

until it throws up  
its meal.  
I choke on the loves

it has hunted,  
who were once  
all of my loves.

## *Dead Whistle*

She walks around the parking lot  
whistling for someone.

Here I sit watching her,  
wondering if I should  
answer her call.

That is one way to find  
something, whistle,  
but the dead don't answer  
whistles in the day,  
and be wary if you call  
at night, they will come.

They come, I guess, like most  
after living flesh,  
a conversation, or  
company.

She walks away and  
I don't follow.

I sit and wait  
for the next one.

## *Crazy Horse Nightmares*

In my dreams,  
I ride a red horse.  
This beast is fear.  
It is my friend,  
father, confessor,  
my will to go  
deeper into the night.  
I am headed home.  
I am alive and chased  
by Crazy Horse.  
I feel his arrows hit  
my body.  
Each one is made  
from those I had  
let down,  
those who loved me,  
those who wondered  
at my anger.

Who is my death bringer?  
The one who loves my body?  
The one whose desire  
is to take part  
in my soul?  
Have you made  
these arrows to fling  
at this huge piece of meat,  
these bones,  
this skull?

Here I am  
living the history

that brought me  
to the now  
in the work I do.

We all want to be warriors,  
but if war is all the time,  
there are no winners.  
In this, how do I measure  
the small triumphs  
against this self-doubt?  
Where is the beauty  
I am to walk?  
Half of my life is  
not in my control.  
Half of my life  
is destroyed by  
Crazy Horse nightmares.

I wake to count the glories  
in one hand,  
and in the other palm  
hold the happiness  
that can kill me,  
that can set me free,  
that I am needing to swallow,  
and finally be safe  
among the shadows  
that circle my days  
and cover me at dusk.

I am an urban Indian  
in a city of broken people.

I am the one who killed Crazy Horse  
in every Indian  
on any street corner,  
office desk, or barstool.  
I killed those who made a hero  
out of a warrior.

## *She Is Now a Poem*

We meet for a few beers.  
I let her read one of my newest verses.  
She has all my books,  
but this one is a new piece.  
She reads it and tears up  
at my contemplation of night.  
We talk about  
antidepressants, suicide attempts,  
hospital visits, and shrinks.  
“If we had children,” she says,  
“They would look like us  
black hair, brown eyes, cheekbones.”  
Then we are in my single bed.  
She darts her tongue in and out of my mouth.  
I have to pull her hair to slow her down.  
I teach her to kiss.  
I suck on her huge tits,  
her areolas are shaped like faint stars.  
She leaves her panties on.  
She won’t let me slide in.  
“It’s a mess down there,” she says,  
“I’m on my period.”  
She says, “It’s a good thing  
we don’t do it, I want children.”  
She moans when we kiss and  
I poke at her black panties.  
“If you can’t be a poet,” I say,  
“then be the poem.”  
“I know,” she says.  
We kiss at the door.  
She leaves, walks into that  
great, lonely night I wrote about.

I relieve myself in bed alone  
thinking about her tits,  
her moans,  
what she would've felt like,  
and my disdain for children.

## *It Is Called a Chow Line*

I see them every morning  
waiting for breakfast  
in a line along a building  
wrapping around the city block.  
Homeless men and women  
smoking cigarettes,  
nipping at bottles,  
wiping rain from brow.  
They squat or stand,  
then the line moves  
into the soup kitchen.  
The meal is free.  
It is warm inside  
as they sit at tables,  
swiping S.O.S. with  
a flaky biscuit,  
and blow before  
sipping on their hot coffee.  
During the meal  
there is laughter,  
a small prayer is answered.  
They stay as long as they can  
until they walk the streets  
and sleep somewhere out of the rain.





STEVE PACHECO



## *History*

Cousin, how useless now  
are the dirt road days  
when we whirled roundhouse  
kicks at one another with our bare feet,

and how we listened to our fathers  
kindle the fire water in the kitchen  
gives us January memories

of times we spent in the gravel pit  
playing war with plastic Army men  
only tells half the history  
of the little lives we razed.

Your first winter home  
snowfall arrived early.  
The multihued hills of the rez  
turned the same color brown  
as your camouflage fatigues.  
I thought it was coincidence.  
Maybe the snow flourished  
to welcome you like a kindred spirit.  
Maybe, *tahansi*, it was our time  
for history to surround us.

## *City Elegy for a Nameless Skin*

*And indeed if it be the Design of Providence to extirpate these savages  
in order to make room for the Cultivators of the Earth, it seems not  
improbable that Rum may be the appointed Means.*

—Benjamin Franklin

Stagger-stepping down  
 the infamous Franklin Ave.  
 with a Marlboro dangling from my lips.  
 It's 1:30 A.M. and I'm going nowhere  
 Cold night in a cold city  
 where gangs and pimps are kings  
 of dirty streets and hundred dollar hustles.  
 By a bridge, an old Indian man,  
 high on wine asks me for some spare change.  
 I flip him a five and look at his weathered face  
 holding forty years of relocated pain.  
 Remnants of gold paint speckled  
 across his mouth from huffing fumes  
 to either escape the pain, or end it,  
 I don't know which. In his face,  
 I see a young Indian boy.  
 In his face I see that this city  
 is no place for an Indian.

## *Uncle*

I've seen the greatest punch ever thrown.  
A sharp short left hook to the jaw  
of Kenny "The Cobra" Jones.

Dear Uncle's swift hands of stone  
left us stunned, in awe.  
I've seen the greatest punch ever thrown.

Indians fight back. Uncle John  
slurs, quivers, but retells what we saw  
when he punched Kenny "The Cobra" Jones.

After endless years of staggering home  
whiskey bottles hidden in the basement below  
I've seen the greatest punch ever thrown.

He sits on the front porch alone  
staring, his mind recalling how  
he punched Kenny "The Cobra" Jones.

The leather gloves still glisten  
in a box beneath old clothes even now.  
I saw the greatest punch ever thrown  
when Uncle John beat Kenny "The Cobra" Jones.

## *Indian Country*

They sang the smoky night away. They sang songs of heartbreak and cattle and booze. They sang about open prairies and ex's living in Texas. They sang about cheating hearts. They sang Merle, Johnny, Hank, Patsy, and George. They wore beaded belt buckles and black cowboy hats with feathers. We tried on their black leather vests and ribbon shirts. We put on their boots and tripped on the carpet. They sang over 8-tracks, over our TV, out the windows, into the country rez night.

Bottles, ashtrays, cans on the table. Poker chips, a deck of cards, some spare change. Like that the morning came. A bike ride to the store for worms and minnows. The afternoon smell of fish frying in the kitchen, masking the smells from the night before.

## *Veteran's Day*

*for Wallace J. Smith Jr., 82nd Airborne*

I still think of that morning when I tried to imitate a crow and fell on my face. Their loud caws outside the barred windows of your garden-level apartment made me get up and hop on one leg. We just returned from the Veteran's Day powwow in Sisseton and you'd been home less than a year, working security at the casino.

You showed me pictures of young men on tanks. You pulled out your beret and said how you missed the winters. Before the blizzard began we sipped on coffee and talked about god, liquor, and our fathers.

## *Lonesome Night*

I grew up under the swaying hips of Elvis. I watched his legs move side to side like the pendulum on a grandfather clock, hitting each beat of *Blue Suede Shoes*. Father, in his oil scented work clothes, strutted around the house to *Go Cat Go*, posed in vintage Elvis, and all the children loved him.

I once peeked out my bedroom door to see him sing *Are You Lonesome Tonight?* He slow danced in the kitchen with an imaginary woman. Within weeks he cut his hair like Elvis and left for the cities.

I come back to that lonesome night every time I think of my father. And like the children of the house, I too want to remember him like I remember Elvis—young, handsome, and unaffected.

## Rocks

*for M.B. and the incarcerated Indians of the Lino Lakes  
Correctional Facility circa 1999.*

You called a week earlier  
saying the brothers were low  
on sage and rocks for the sweat.  
I still had “Black Beauty”  
that rusty ’78 pickup  
abandoned behind the shed.  
I loaded the bed with rocks  
from the river, large round ones  
that turn aglow from fire,  
ingrained along the steep banks  
where we first witnessed  
the shrill cry of a rabbit  
clutched in the beak  
of a red-tail hawk.

*Spirits*, you said  
*the river’s known to do that.*  
You took tobacco and sprinkled it  
on the ground before we ran  
from the thunderheads creeping  
over the tree line.

Brother, when you come home  
we’ll go back to the boat landing,  
throw rocks high in the air  
anticipating the sound  
of rock/hitting/water.

And if we should hear  
the rabbit’s death,

or the sky turns black overhead,  
this time we'll stay to watch  
like we should've done  
the time of year when  
chokecherries ripen.

## *Waiting for the Barbarians*

My mother and the rest of the kids from the rez walked to school every day, and when they got to the bottom of the hill the kids from town waited so they could throw things from behind the trees, pat their hands over their mouths, and run to the schoolyard. Once, when my mother was hit with a stick, she ran home to tell her brother. That night he gathered up his friends and went down to the bottom of the hill before sunrise to wait for the kids from town to show. When the rez boys heard the kids approaching, they hid behind the trees. When the kids reached the grove, the rez boys grabbed them by their shirts and brought them to the train trestle where they showed the kids from town some rope and said they were going to tie them to the tracks. My uncle's friend Freddy, the crazy one, held one kid over the edge by his ankles, dangling him over the river. After the rez boys made the kids from town run to the schoolyard crying, they walked back up the hill and passed by my mother and the rest of the kids from the rez walking to school, and they didn't exchange a word.

## *Sugar Bowl*

*after Etheridge Knight*

I.

There's a running joke within my family about diabetes. It goes like this. When you meet someone and they ask you what type of Indian you are, you answer by either saying Type I or Type II. The reality is nearly everyone in my family has the disease. My mother. My father. All my grandparents, before they died. Three of five aunts (two dead). Three of four uncles (three dead). Each person spent the latter part of their life with a whole new vocabulary of insulin, blood sugar level, and, to me, the scariest word I remember as a child, dialysis.

II.

I watched my Uncle Steve disappear in front of my adolescent eyes. It started with his toes, then half of his foot, then all of his foot. Next he lost a finger, and then a couple more . . . When Uncle Steve died, he was in a wheelchair, missing half a leg and six fingers.

III.

The old saying is that diabetes skips a generation, but with my family it didn't even skip siblings. In later years, after I went to college, I read numerous books that discuss the epidemic of diabetes among American Indian communities. It was there I learned about the food of my parents' youth—government commodities—food that the government sends to reservations. Growing up, commodities were always in our shelves, but I never knew what they contained. High in fat. Preservatives. Salt. All of which lead to things like obesity, alcoholism, and of course, diabetes. From these texts I learned the scariest word of my adult life, genocide.

IV.

Each year at Christmastime my mother puts out two bowls of candy—sugar and sugarless. Sometimes I catch her sneaking from the sugar bowl and remind her to only take one. She returns the favor to me when I reach for the salt to put on anything.

v.

He dealt with the disease the same way our family dealt with most things, through humor. On Sundays our family gathered to watch football. An all-conference running back himself in high school, Uncle Steve looked forward to these events, and like everybody else, he was a huge Minnesota Vikings fan. When the Vikings would score, instead of saying, “gimme five,” he would say, “Alright nephew! gimme three.” And I would stick out my thumb, pinky, and index finger to touch his as the people around us whooped and hollered.

VI.

During the harsh prairie winters the pipes under our house would freeze. We boiled snow so that we had something to cook with and something to eat. We drank syrupy canned grape juice. We ate powdered milk and powdered eggs. And bacon. On more than one occasion, I remember eating bacon for breakfast and dinner. To us children, the burnt bits were a treat like rock candy. When the grease hardened in the pan, we spread it over Wonder Bread.

## *Our Life*

I looked for my father in littered streets of the cities. He told me stories of the hardcore joints he loved—bikers, ex-cons, Indians trying to get home. I searched the names from memory. *Moby Dick's*, *The Commodore*, *Mr. Art's*, and *The Abyss*.

I sat next to an Indian man, tall and skinny, wearing a red sweatshirt with the faded word in white, Haskell.

He wanted to know my story (I wanted to know his). I told him my name and he said he knew my father from boarding school days at Marty Mission. We talked over the jukebox about common kin and forgotten friends.

It was our life that night. A loner and a bastard. At closing we shook hands and headed down separate paths in the moonless blue night that is America.

## *Arrival Song*

*I am a man of so many homecomings*

—Pablo Neruda

July. Catfish. Minnesota River.  
Stars shine and shoot across  
the black template of another prairie night.  
Water kisses granite, and retreats.  
Boulders lodged in mud  
mark the years we leave,  
only to come back.

This is the time of berries.  
This is the year of open arms.  
Embrace the trestles and all  
its rotting wood. The old  
wagon bridge. The cold springs.  
Birch Coulee. Sage budding  
on the hillside.

Embrace it all. The tracks  
we walk along to come home.  
Our return to summer stories  
told at the gatherings.

## *But Tonight I Praise It*

The ceaseless prairie winds fended mosquitoes while sparrows struggled to land on the increasingly bare branches. Autumn. The time of year when green hills of the river turn into a dead brown, and the geese fly from the same direction as the wind.

I heard them this evening. It sounded like war whoops, but when I looked to the low clouds: nothing. Just *wakiya* putting on a light show down the horizon. I picked up the small gifts the wind had left at my feet, and thanked it for its resilient grace.

## *Prairie Prayer*

A quiet night except for the usual  
music of crickets and frogs croaking.  
Everything depends on the river.  
Mist covers the valley and the harvest moon  
drapes September air. Tonight we notice  
deer tracks engraved in soft dirt  
along the cottonwoods, we listen  
to leaves rustle in the faithful wind.  
Born on the banks, this is our home.  
Granite fields and rock quarries  
carry stories into winter.  
The cragged voice of the bluffs remind  
us that faces need not be carved in stone.

*The Lower Sioux Rez: Three Scenes*

I.

I feel I owe something to the blue jays for their loyalty.  
February hints at snow, and tricks  
cardinals into an early spring-red.  
But the blue jays hold their color, and govern  
the shrubs behind my house like senators.

II.

The coyote, impossibly scrawny with knots  
of orange fur on its legs, paces  
on the icy river. Large clumps of snow  
drop from cedars and pines. Startled,  
she sprints down the open path  
unable to scatter to the comfort of trees,  
without the ability to run on the steep blue banks.

III.

When the prairie winter folds away like a blanket  
legions of frogs return from the river.  
In late autumn, they make their odyssey through mud,  
covering roads, resting in sloughs.  
Their long legs, suspended in air, glimmer  
in the cars' headlights.

The frogs come back after *the melt*.  
Heavy. Stomachs hard from swallowing stones.

## *Wacipi*

### I.

People from everywhere have come  
to the Lower Sioux hill to dance and sing  
long after the triumphant stars shine

over oaks and pines. The drum echoes  
and we know it can be heard  
for miles and miles. And the laughter

can be heard for miles and miles  
while children run, couples dance,  
and small fires smolder.

### II.

The rain calms the dust  
and the sun dries wet grass  
Across the river, a rainbow

arches within the valley's touch.  
The food line long with stories,  
chatter, and hand shakes.

### III.

Have you ever heard the drum beat  
and the thunder's bellow fill summer  
nights when the river whispers

and the leaves dance before  
rain begins to tap the tents  
of campers hiding

because they too notice  
the absence of emerald  
fireflies pulsing by the creek?

## *Homeland*

The lampshade turned stain-yellow  
from Pall Malls. Uncle always  
smoked non-filter. Past bedtime  
I hid behind the recliner  
listening to stories about train rides  
from Rocky Boy, Montana.

Blended together: Tobacco smoke  
wood smoke, and sage.

At the kitchen table he taught  
how to play poker and gin rummy.  
He showed me how to shuffle and bridge.  
We wagered candy canes  
and anted salted peanuts.  
He cracked the shells for me  
until his fingertips grew raw.

## *Her Belly*

Brown and immense her belly  
sits in front of her, guides her.

Her belly is round  
and highlights her beauty

her legs, her breasts, her mind.  
At night she craves ketchup,

oranges, and milk.  
I say her belly could be

the moon as I kiss it.  
Sometimes I gently rub

her belly in a steady rhythm.  
Sometimes I cup it

in my hand feeling for a beat.  
I draw circles with my finger

around her oversized belly button.  
Most of all, I love to play music

to it softly: the drum.  
I want the little one to hear,

feel the drum inside.  
I want us all to feel the drum inside.

## *Star Quilt*

The flower patterns faced outside  
so the lavender border  
framed the window. The eagle's  
wings outstretched to the tips  
of the star, and her tail fanned  
out to the bottom like a winter horizon.

At the giveaway  
last summer  
you said  
the blanket  
would keep me  
warm in the months  
ahead.

With the emergence of winter  
winds I took the quilt down  
and wrapped myself in its  
soft, thick, layers.

The eagle hugged my back  
while the star shrouded my body  
on the cold wood floor.

Come time for spring and I remember  
you, your frail bones, the hours spent  
weaving a story with your hands.  
And like I learned from the women  
of the family:

I looked  
for one  
crooked  
stitch.

## *On the Anniversary of Her Wake*

*for Rosie Cloud*

I saw her reflection  
between the ashen clouds  
in the dappled light at dawn.  
She wore whirling colors  
of red and yellow.

I knew her dance.  
She danced among the clouds  
from the west as they gathered  
to smudge this thirsty land  
and tame the smothering dust.

## *First of the Month*

Casino lights and cornfields.  
One-armed bandits and one-eyed  
jacks lure farmers in flannel  
and mesh hats to spend  
government pay on jackpot dreams.  
The paved road sprawls across the rez  
reaching redneck towns where boys  
play tag in pickups with CB's.

On the rez roads, dogs  
on hunt for food stalk ditches,  
the pack scatters when  
a couple approaches their path.  
The gravel leads to the fire pit.  
Tonight, the bass music thumps  
from SUVs where skins sit,  
waiting for new stories to be told.

*Eden Prairie, Minnesota*

the hitchhiker points west  
with his thumb while he walks  
down the freeway. in one hand  
he keeps the book wrapped in silk,  
neat and convenient. his weathered  
face rough like the snake skin  
boots he wears for character.

across the apple orchard  
past the lush valley, into the prairie  
he walks like a giant with purpose.

he walks down the freeway  
to the edge of the earth  
or the end of america  
whichever comes first.

## *Brothers*

### I.

We left the reservation early Friday morning to make our way to Santee, Nebraska. It was our first trip together since Waylon returned home from the Army where he spent four years jumping out of airplanes—one of which he did a tour in Iraq in Desert Storm. The previous night's rain left the ground soft and the air thick. Waylon waited outside while I was getting our bags. Through the living room window I watched as he drew lines in the mud with the tips of his shoe. I never felt more close to my brother than that late August morning.

### II.

Cornfields and bean fields. The land farmers somehow thought tamable. We drove west by southwest down county highways. I stared out the window at the endless fields of black dirt and it reminded me of our childhood. We would play outside on the dirt roads with little plastic figures of green army men. We set them up in strategic places and shot them down with rubber bands. Because I am five years younger than my brother, I hardly won. Except for the times, I know now, he let me.

We stopped in Sioux Falls at a Perkins to get some coffee and something to eat. Outside the restaurant, there was a huge American flag. The way it flapped in the constant prairie wind was as constant as a drum. I pointed to the enormity of it. Waylon nodded. He then turned to me and said, "That flag is big enough to make outfits for all the dancers in the world."

### III.

As we continued south we listened to the radio and talked about the past four years. The music was mostly old rock and country because that's the only choice South Dakota gives you. "*I'm burnin' I'm burnin'*"

*I'm burnin' for you.*" I turned it up and said, "You know, this song's all about a guy who catches the clap."

Waylon chuckled and said, "Remember when uncle Mark told us about the time he was in the Philippines, and he saw a dude pass out after taking a piss?"

"Yeah," I said, "because of the pain."

We looked at one another for a brief second and started to laugh. This is how our trip went. We exchanged stories while the land so familiar to us gave way to wheat fields and their crimson colors.

After we arrived in Santee, we visited our cousin's house. Our Aunt Fran knew we were coming so she made space for us to sleep. I could tell Waylon was content. We came here a lot as kids—spent a good portion of our summers here. On this return trip we went to the powwow all day and at night played spades back at Aunt Fran's.

## *Love Poem*

We drove to the VA hospital  
where they cut off the remainder  
of your toeless foot.

On the way home, we took  
the back roads, hoping  
to shine a deer

for venison to eat  
with the commodity stew  
simmering on the stove.





JOEL WATERS



## *Devil's Playground*

I have found myself  
Backsliding again.  
Back, back, back,  
Into the tragic of my kind.  
Into the burdens of my stereotypes.  
As rednecks in the Midwest  
Look at me like I'm an animal at a zoo.  
Monkey see, so monkey do.  
And what will I do?  
When the role they want for me  
Is right for the coloring of my skin.  
See the red devil?  
See that he is the cause of his own sin?  
And these labels  
They can gnash at you  
Make you uneasy.  
Make you dizzy.  
Like the bullying  
Of all your holy  
Merry-go-rounds.  
Give us sanctity,  
Except for the browns.  
And we still go swinging  
Back and forth  
On the history of our beginnings,  
And who really owns mother earth.  
And the school teachers  
The Darwinians  
Say it's all about natural selection.  
And me and my kind  
Are still somehow two shades away  
From evolution.

And so you will find us swinging  
In the jungle gyms of your mind.  
After all this country did its best  
To cause the end of my kind.  
But see, saw,  
Forget it all.  
As America expects us all  
To play nice with one another.  
But in the devil's playground  
There are angels,  
And there are the unfortunate others.

## *The Outhouse*

The outhouse  
Still stands  
Behind my grandma's house.  
As a reminder of where I come from  
Of where I've been.  
And that it was not so long ago  
That we used to use it  
The way the government used us.  
No flush! No flush!  
It still stands there  
Piling up.  
Like a reminder  
That my family in Pine Ridge  
Still uses one.  
I'm tired of people asking  
Where I come from.  
I am a Native American.  
But that's not all there is  
To me, me, me!  
I just want to flush  
The toilet!  
So I don't have to keep smelling  
My poverty.  
On the potty  
—The potty.  
So I party  
And I have a good time  
Getting wasted.  
So I don't have to think of the waste  
That is coming out of me,  
That is becoming me.  
I just want to write good poetry!

But I tear the words  
Right off of the  
Roll of the role  
That I played as a student.  
And I ball up those  
Words like toilet paper  
And I use the world  
To wipe my ass.  
Because let's face it  
Everyone can have a toilet bowl mouth.  
And no matter how many times  
Flushed or hushed  
It's still the same shit swirling about.  
But it doesn't matter  
Right now!  
Because that outhouse is still  
Behind my grandma's house.  
And I just can't flush  
These words these thoughts  
Of what I am and what I am not.  
And does it define who I am  
And what I am anyway  
Is just another poet  
-Who rephrases, rewrites, reverts,  
Verse after verse  
Of recycled shit!  
And damn it!  
I just wish,  
I could flush this.

## *Picking Potatoes*

My mother used to pick potatoes  
and other vegetables  
Along with her dad.  
She grew up like that.  
She grew as big as she could in a shack.  
Next to a huge farmhouse  
where there were plenty of rooms  
to store the dreams  
that were pulled from her  
Like weeds.

And then came seventeen  
in the mid-seventies.  
She had to harvest her sins  
She had to bring another life in.  
In a time of her great depression,  
In a time of an Indian famine.

My older brother  
would sit with her  
for five minutes at a time  
in the field.  
Being planted row after row  
As mother picked the potatoes.  
It's no wonder he never stays long  
Anywhere he goes.

His roots don't grow  
His roots don't show.  
He has put on a covering  
Of gangster talk  
—Black slang.

Often times he's Mexican  
Because he can't  
Settle for being just Indian.

And there are many eyes  
That look out to the rest of this root-covering world  
And we are all guilty of wanting to be another color  
Even I used to pray to my pagan god  
That I didn't look like my dark-skinned brothers.

## *The Linoleum Heart*

I used to walk barefoot  
On the linoleum.  
The sticky beer stuck to me  
Like men's stuff sticks.  
There's a kind of dirtiness  
One can get used to.  
I know what lies  
In beer cans.  
I used to collect them  
When I was a kid.  
Until that night  
A man knocked down my pyramid.  
I know what lies  
In the gazes of drunk men.  
I've collected them,  
I collect them.

I remember playing  
With toy cars.  
I used to crash them,  
On the linoleum.  
The way they crashed him  
—My dad  
Who was just an outline.  
There was nothing anyone could fill in.  
Not one crayon.  
I knew how to draw mom  
But how did I draw you, dad?  
I drew others instead.

I used to lie on those older boys  
The way ink lies on paper.

I could never understand it.  
 Maybe it was a metaphor?  
 Maybe I was just a good whore?  
 Daddy,  
 They never told me different.  
 But I never saw myself  
 As innocent.  
 (Like the children of the flesh,  
 I was born into it.)

I'd lie on the floor  
 Tracing my future  
 Chalk line, outline.  
 —A BODY!  
 That was never mine.  
 Until Gestapo boots stomped in.  
 I was always in fear  
 Waiting for a final solution.  
 It was in my blood  
 —The red paint that got splattered.  
 And whether I'm lying,  
 Sitting, or standing.  
 I find myself in the same old patterns.

On the linoleum,  
 (A permanent mark)  
 I am still trying to figure out  
 —Who I really am.

## *Wannabe*

I used to be able to walk  
downtown pine ridge  
anytime I wanted  
but now I can't even go a block  
without some dumb young cock  
flashing like a siren  
the affiliation he's representing.  
Even children have that  
hardcore attitude.  
And I think "better black than white?"  
But either way it does me no good.  
Because I know how quickly  
things can become ghetto.  
As we bust out our windows  
and spray paint our walls.  
Names emblazoned to show  
who has the most scars.  
In a culture barely preserved  
saran-wrapped, gangster-rapped  
while the rest of America  
sits and watches  
in the spoils of her wars.  
It's so easy to become hardcore.  
Especially when there is no one  
around to hug you and love you  
and to say "I'm proud of you,  
I believe in you."  
It will never matter how in  
I wannabe,  
Or if what I say is un-American.  
I will never put anything  
before the importance

of my own skin.  
And if it's a choice between black or white  
then I'd rather fill my own color in.  
Because my family fought hard  
and even though they've all fallen  
—I'm going to climb out of their beer can coffins.  
I'm going to rise from their cigarette ashes,  
and make them feel proud again.

## *Spirits Underneath an Artificial Blue Sky*

The boards in the house are loose.  
Some are rotting away,  
Others have been peeled back.  
The black mold  
Has filled their chests.  
There is no breathing room  
But we still live here.

The walls have been  
Cracked like smiles  
By angry fists and clumsy  
Kid hands.  
I have written on these walls  
An unfinished epitaph.

Stains mark the walls  
Like liver spots.  
Some are chipped and showing  
The true color underneath.  
I hate the color.  
It is too blue,  
As we sleep underneath  
Our artificial sky.

No one cleans anymore.  
The holes have taken over.  
So often we disappear.  
—No obligations.  
We cover them with rugs  
And hideous couches.  
Forgetting the things underneath.

We still hold this house together.  
 We manage to keep the doors locked.  
 And use the antique dresser  
 With only so many handles  
 To hold on to.  
 These wounds we ignore.  
 Plug up with tissue,  
 Hide behind posters.  
 And we are okay  
 As long as the white world  
 Does not peek in.  
 Because we have been naked  
 In our savagery  
 For far too long.

It would be better  
 If we still lived in teepees.  
 There are only two holes,  
 —One on the top  
 In which we can escape  
 Into the stars like smoke.  
 Instead of falling  
 Through the ones  
 That are all around our souls.  
 Making us condemned.  
 Unfit to live in.

## *Rez Cars Crash*

Seems like all my life  
Has been just bits and pieces  
Of junk cars, Rez cars  
—Loud and exploding  
As they pass me by.  
Like some bad nightmare  
I have to open my eyes.  
And everyone I know  
Just gives a part of themselves.  
A junkyard of living  
And then they die  
Without me truly knowing them.

Seems like every time  
I try to fix up my life  
And make it shine  
I break down,  
And I end up  
Hiding inside  
My family's house.  
Where my dreams rust  
And I cover it with lies.

I ignore the problems.  
And they become like those  
Junk cars  
Ditched in the river.  
And like them  
I am halfway submerged  
In the murky water  
Of this world's tired womb.  
Abort

Breech  
 And divert.  
 This contract  
 That I have made  
 With god?  
 The creator? The spirit world?  
 I am done  
 Thumbing  
 Down that highway to heaven  
 That has claimed so many Indians.

I am just shattered glass  
 By the side of the road.  
 And I just want to pop  
 All egos.  
 Because no Indian can suffer  
 More than me.  
 I am the epitome  
 Of the tragic Indian  
 With a backseat  
 —Back trunk  
 Full of baggage.  
 And my therapist  
 Has tried to break open the lock.  
 And I myself have used  
 So many wire hangers  
 Trying to scratch  
 At the afterbirth.  
 Because mom  
 Never wanted me,  
 Because dad  
 Never claimed me.

I am a fetus.  
Exposed  
And ready to crash.  
And Jesus  
Everyone on the rez  
Is ready to crash.  
Implode and explode.  
Let our deaths be as violent  
As our births.  
And maybe when we hit  
Head on  
We can knock through  
The misconception  
That we are going  
To the white mans' heaven.  
Lord, God, Tunkasila (grandfather),  
I am tired of stalling  
And co-dependently  
Waiting for a ride.  
I just want to drive  
I just want to drive  
And then dive into the ditch, and die!

## *Into the Turtle's Cracks*

Into the cracks of the turtle's back I go  
 feeling weary and old.  
 I am tired of always surfacing.  
 Up to my neck in the memories  
 That drown me.  
 Let this ground give away  
 From underneath me.  
 For the turtle  
 —She has stood for far too long.

Because my mother,  
 She was gone like that.  
 And now there is no footing.  
 It became easy  
 To hold on to anyone that came along.  
 But every home that I had  
 Began to crack.  
 Too many beds  
 For just one back.  
 So I turned away  
 From the one night stands  
 But I am always quick to snap.  
 Because my mother  
 —She was cruel like that.

I wandered through many cities  
 Trying to find stability,  
 But like the turtle's shell  
 I am stuck  
 In the grid  
 of the city streets  
 and the country roads.

No matter where I go  
I cannot find an edge  
but the razors.

So I cut my way home  
because mother  
had the same veins.  
It's in my blood.  
The directions.  
But no one sees  
that I am on my way.  
So I tuck my scarred wrists  
into my cuffs  
and I hide my legs.

I was so young  
when I started,  
just like she was  
when she let me go.  
I was always on my own.  
Carried too long  
on my ancestors' backs.  
I just want to slip  
into the cracks  
because she  
was unknown,  
unknown like that.  
So when mother earth  
opens up to me,  
I will finally be  
... at home.

*Cherry*

Cherry, cherry  
—That's what they called me.  
Ever since  
The blood was made to flow.  
Like the time that boy hit me  
And made it come out of my nose.  
He wanted me  
To be weak like a girl.

They used to call me cherry.  
Because one day  
Someone dressed me up  
Like a little doll.  
I stood four feet tall,  
But still it was a long fall  
As they knocked me  
To the floor.  
They were sickened by me.  
As I did a twirl  
For them, for them.  
It was always for them  
—The ones who lost their  
Innocence at the stem.

And I was green  
At first  
And then red  
—Blood blooming,  
Because I wouldn't  
Do what they said.

Cherry  
Before I reached  
The age of maturity.  
Because one night  
I met a man,  
And was he sweet like family?  
Or just another stranger with candy?  
I cannot tell,  
I do not remember  
Such choke cherry things.

But we shared  
A bed that night,  
And he unwrapped us  
Like a tampon.  
Just me and him  
With only a blanket on.  
And I could go on  
But I just as well  
Would like to stop there.

As a child  
I wasn't very tough.  
They used to call me cherry  
Because faggot  
Was a word  
That just wasn't enough.

## *The Cigarette Burns*

The cigarette burns  
Branded me  
Like a fat little  
Brown cow  
—As dumb as the bell  
tied around me.  
I must've walked  
In loud chunks.  
Because HE heard  
Every time I left the farm.  
Then it was always  
Back into the red barn.  
As red as my eyes were  
When he wrestled me  
To the ground.  
How the rope burned,  
Poking me  
Like stitches.  
While the other little  
Piggies looked on  
—Them bitches!  
I will never forgive them  
For just getting  
Cut off at their hogs feet.  
While he butchered the rest of me.

But not before leaving  
The angry marks  
His signature was all over me.  
So if the white ranchers  
Ever found me  
Hiding in their pastures

They'd take me back to him  
For sure.  
I never minded  
Standing in my own feces.  
I never minded  
Him kicking the shit  
Out of my back.  
It's just all the scars  
That remained after that.

So many cigarette hole-burned  
Circles.  
Connect the dots  
One, two, three,  
The image is his  
And never me.  
And every year  
Dragged to the redneck rodeos.  
I never had any other place  
To go.  
When they broke the cattle  
I always thought next  
It would be my turn.  
I have faced it many times  
—the cock piece,  
Saddle horn,  
Stinging spurs.  
I always wanted to be a him  
But I was always her  
—That bitch who left me  
To die there.

Soon, soon  
A new brand  
Will be at home on me.  
As I welcome the burn  
Of an eminent cancer,  
or HIV.  
Because even now  
I mark myself.  
I make my own hell.  
But it's not the same burn,  
The scars are not as real  
As your signature.



LUKE WARM WATER



## *Art of Huffing Paint*

*All our friends are dead,  
Or they're dying,  
And our laughter only turns into crying,  
It's death-defying.*

—from the Hoodoo Gurus song *Death Defying*

When the green lizard is gone  
while you're on the wrong planet  
whom silver and gold are your best friends  
where train tracks run behind Safeway  
Mills Drug Store and Don Margo's Liquor store  
near the viaduct from which that sign  
proudly proclaimed  
North Rapid, A Great Place  
circa 1970s Rapid City, South Dakota

Pass out drainage tunnels or  
in thickets on abandoned lots  
empty Wonder Bread bags  
of modern day warrior dreams unfulfilled

Riding my orange Schwinn banana seat bicycle  
with the cool black racing stripe fenders  
innocence of summer break days  
grades take new meaning when  
uphill peddling with only one gear  
coasting down all too familiar  
cracked pavement streets  
gravel alleys soaked with black oil  
dirt walking paths  
keeping my distance  
from those unfortunate misplaced



spirited warrior ghosts  
my fear stronger than compassion

Maneuvering my bike between  
    broken wine bottles  
    pot holes  
    big rocks  
avoiding wipeouts  
like a slalom downhill skier  
going  
for the bronze medal

In turn peddling takes on new meaning  
when there are no more food stamps to sell  
items stolen or fished out of dumpsters  
from Safeway and Mills Drug Store  
and a parking lot resale  
not enough change for a jug  
from Don Margo's Liquor store  
so go find that hidden in the weeds  
spray paint can again

I had witnessed  
too many brown faces with  
silver and gold stained lips  
not yet comprehending at that young age  
this could have been my future

## *Blip Blip*

Sound wave shaped  
dagger blade  
through the chest  
no vital organs hit  
as heart is being  
digested in guts  
exactly  
shaped  
like a rope

No more  
blip blip  
on your  
radar screen  
not like I had  
DCA to PDX  
not even a  
blip blip  
for you  
in Okie heartland

Most of your  
adult life  
in the South Dakota  
State Penn.  
blip blip  
bad ass Indian  
original gangster  
of Rapid City

That  
check cashing

payday loans  
discount cigarette store  
wooden Indian pose  
with the bandana  
prison tattoos  
between  
the knuckles  
with the 40 oz. beer  
wino paper bag  
closely hugging  
cheap bottle  
in a manic clutch  
hands sharing  
steering wheel  
road blurry  
as paint brushes  
chase  
into corners  
of dead end  
North Rapid  
neighborhoods  
    no right turn  
    for the Red man

Your world  
only knew  
prison and  
our side of town  
blip blip  
no more  
as heartbeat

finds its last  
final  
violent  
thump

In those  
final moments  
of your fate  
I seriously doubt  
you reminisce  
as kids  
sharing our bikes  
riding on  
Lemmon St.  
or  
grade school  
recess  
where no one  
could beat you  
at shooting marbles  
I swear you could hit  
a boulder marble  
dead on  
from 30 ft. away  
before  
shooting meant  
for you;  
firearm pistols  
fire arms from  
boot'n it needles  
blip blip

wash'n it all down  
with shots of  
fire liquor breath

I wonder  
what  
must  
have  
been  
in your  
thoughts

Just before  
you  
hung  
yourself

## *Chief Bigfoot Death Pose and the Pawn Shop Receipt*

*Kit was glad to leave South Dakota behind and cursed its name. He said that if the Communists ever dropped the atomic bomb, he wished they'd put it right in the middle of Rapid City.*

—Sissy Spacek's character Holly Sargis, from the movie *Badlands* (1973)

Cradled in snow  
frozen generations  
Lakota kids crying  
in the backseat  
of a rusted nest  
one-eyed Chevy  
like baby birds  
mouths open  
end of civilization  
on the ice bone wind  
fast forward  
beyond hangovers  
splintered mixed bloods  
pretending to be ghosts  
while  
shopping mall medicine men  
medicine women  
purchasing the herbs  
tinctures of ointments  
at health food stores  
sporting ponytails  
braided so perfect  
fixing up the sure-fire  
remedy  
to get into the souls  
of a mid-life crisis  
America  
curing themselves  
along the way

Cradled in snow  
 frozen fast food wrappers  
 the new generation fed  
 parked in front of Kmart  
 wind whipping  
 clear plastic bag  
 is answer  
 to question of  
 shattered drivers side  
 window

Cradled in snow  
 thick “bucky” Rez accent  
 tongue that never truly graced  
 once beautiful language  
 plastic beads, cloth, silk  
 diligently intertwined  
 for a ribbon shirt  
 of the red bandana protest  
 1970 something on the “Knee”  
 awaits the pawn shop  
 next to Kmart  
 in 100 years  
 this ribbon shirt will sit proud  
 in the Smithsonian  
 as the Little Big Horn war shirts  
 sit today

Cradled in snow  
 frozen tears  
 church on top of  
 burial ground

bird on tombstone  
from Rapid City tourism  
flying due south by  
southwest  
celebrates  
rape of a mountain  
four great white grandfathers  
then rape of another mountain  
some Polish sculptor's  
vision of  
the greatest Lakota warrior  
*Tasunke Witko* (Crazy Horse)  
who never had  
his image  
trapped  
inside a glass photography plate

Cradled in snow  
Chief Big Foot's death photo  
carved in my mind  
as the sound  
of the pawn shop  
cash register  
eats and pukes money  
uniformed cashier  
writes earnestly  
on a small notepad  
soldier of sales  
he stops and asks for  
my signature  
which I give then receive  
cash loan

he initials the paper  
tears it off  
he keeps the original  
mine is a copy

I am then handed  
my newest treaty

## *Indian Health Service Clinic*

Martha Vineyard Livingston  
from the East Coast  
new resident medical student  
seeing patients at a South Dakota Reservation clinic

Martha examined an elder Lakota man  
she noticed he was missing all his toes on one foot  
Martha asked him what had happened

Old Lakota man responded  
with a straight stoic face  
*“The Bureau of Indian Affairs cut my toes off  
one  
by  
one  
because I wouldn’t sell my land  
so I sold  
before they got to the other foot”*

“Oh my God!”  
Martha believed this  
immediately left the exam room  
to tell the clinic doctor  
what he said  
this elderly man needed legal help  
he was being extorted

The clinic doctor laughed and laughed  
at Martha Vineyard Livingston  
the east coast medical student  
telling her



that he had his toes removed  
from complications of diabetes

This is an example  
of not understanding  
Indian humor

## *Welfare Bliss*

It happens the first of every month  
reminiscent the days  
of food stamps turned into cheap wine  
months become years  
and move with indifference  
with a fistful of welfare check money  
she put the bad medicine on you  
after sundown  
and did it with a breath wink  
hiccup exclamation  
that's how she works  
inhaling breath with rage  
and expelling it without reason  
hiccup again  
with the smell of stale beer  
and cheap cigarettes on her breath  
she is either going to hug and kiss you  
or tear you a new asshole  
possibly both at some point tonight  
either way she'll be feeding you  
fried egg sandwiches  
in the hangover morning  
that's how it works  
one Budweiser pitcher at a time

*Martin, South Dakota Needed a Martini Waitress*

Feelings of loneliness surrounded 3 A.M.

Outside the motel room I listened  
to a semitruck  
jake break  
on nearby Highway 18

Time forgets tribulation  
of an Indian Reservation border town

Thoughts turn  
to the downtown Martin, South Dakota  
greasy spoon café I had dinner at  
smile and welcoming phrase  
from the white waitress  
another Rez Injun customer  
did she feel prejudice and greed?  
another Rez Injun stranger  
did she feel my eyes upon her flirting skirt?  
she was young and blonde beautiful  
I had shut my eyes for a moment  
envisioning sex with her and the patterns  
our blonde and black hair would make  
on the white pillow case  
in my motel room

I ordered another drink and said nothing

Thoughts turn to the silence of sleep

## *Ishi's Hiding Place*

Yahi tribal land  
a long way from the streets of San Francisco  
no use to go back  
only spirits inhabit the land

What was your name Ishi?  
your people's custom forbade you to say it  
so you were called "man" in Yahi  
so anthropologists and newspapers  
knew what to call you

One of the few of your tribe who survived  
the Three Knolls Massacre  
how fitting forty-some years later  
in 1911 you appeared near Oroville, California  
you willingly emerged to a group of butchers  
at a nearby slaughter house corral

What was your name Ishi?  
touted the last "wild" Indian  
carted off to the University of California in Berkeley  
nursed back to health to be studied  
under house arrest of the city  
and the new civilization  
employed as a janitor  
in the San Francisco Museum of Anthropology

In 1916 dying of tuberculosis  
a death mask prepared in your closing breaths  
to be photographed and displayed  
while your brain shipped to the Smithsonian



the rest of you cremated  
to a San Francisco cemetery

What was your name Ishi?  
it was for you to keep alone  
your only hiding place  
to keep us with a great mystery  
but one thing was for certain  
after your final breath  
no Indian could ever go back

## *John Wayne's Bullet*

*Tunkasila* (Grandfather)  
John Wayne and his like  
shot us

Wounded we are recovering  
removing the bullets:  
    racism, genocide  
    booze, heroin  
    Big Macs, cable television  
    and so on . . .

Nursing our torn flesh  
filling the holes with good medicine  
the circle of life  
and the seven sacred rights

Gun powder from their dud cartridges  
to cauterize our wounds

Building common sense  
out of their spent metal casings

Keeping their extracted iron bullets  
from our wounds  
to construct an impervious *tipi* (lodge)  
around our culture

Grandfather  
John Wayne's followers are still shooting  
with their hammer of greed cocked ready  
with their chamber of oppression filled full



with their itchy ignorance finger on the trigger  
with their barrel of assimilation aiming down on us

Grandfather  
we won't steal John Wayne's gun away  
that would make us  
just like him  
So we are saving gun powder  
from their dud cartridges  
to cauterize our wounds  
searching for their spent casings  
from the urban city back alleys  
to the Reservation prairies  
keeping their extracted iron bullets  
from our wounds  
to build the new sacred lodge

*Tunkasila* (Grandfather)  
we will soon have saved enough  
from American society's nothing

To finally protect our grandchildren  
from John Wayne's bullet

## *Pizza Poem*

Are you hungry for pizza?  
my Uncle Verlin was 40 years my senior  
when questioned about his ethnicity  
he would respond  
*Mostly Sioux Indian'*  
*part German and when*  
*it comes to the drink*  
*full-blooded Irishmn'*

Uncle Verlin lived to be an old man  
raised on a ranch  
on a South Dakota Reservation  
by my grandparents  
Uncle Verlin was a true cowboy Indian  
living out his life  
like the songs  
Hank Williams Sr. and Woody Guthrie  
lamented about  
drifting, drinking  
leaving a trail  
of a half dozen pissed off ex-wives  
children claimed and unclaimed  
along the path of his life

One night Uncle Verlin and I  
polished off a fifth of whiskey  
hungry, we decided on pizza  
he had seen TV commercials  
for Pizza Hut  
and wanted to eat at one  
for the first time

Upon our arrival  
a teenaged white boy asked us  
from behind the counter  
what we wanted to order  
*The biggest pizza you have with a lot of extra cheese*  
Uncle Verlin said  
the white kid asked what he wanted  
for toppings  
Uncle Verlin said  
*Tiny little white men*  
the kid behind the counter looked bewildered  
asking "What?"  
*Tiny tiny little white men on my pizza*  
"Uh sir  
we don't have that topping  
do you want a different topping?"  
*NO! I want only tiny tiny little white men on my pizza*  
the white boy behind the counter  
now looked shit scared  
after that Uncle Verlin  
and I lost it  
we laughed and laughed  
all the way home  
carrying our pizza  
with Italian sausage topping

After all  
Columbus was Italian  
we thought it the next best choice  
for a pizza topping

## *The Jesus of Pine Ridge*

The Jesus of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation  
in South Dakota  
was raised speaking Lakota  
until he was five years old  
until he was sent to the Catholic boarding school  
on the Rez  
where the nuns washed  
his native language out of him  
every time he was caught speaking Lakota  
and they washed in English  
with white bar soap

When he was a young teenager  
he had the same recurring dream  
of nuns crucifying him  
atop an old wooden telephone pole  
with No.2 lead pencils  
driven through his palms and feet  
wire notebook binder stretched and wrapped  
around his head like a crown of thorns  
pages of Big Chief notepad paper fastened  
around his waist like a loin cloth

After he ran away from boarding school at age 15  
he never again had that dream  
in that ending of his prophecy vision  
he knew he was the Jesus of Pine Ridge  
destined to deliver the full-bloods and half-breeds  
to the promised land of the sacred  
Black Hills in South Dakota  
or at least to the fertile prairie  
just south of the state line

into Nebraska or at the very least  
anywhere north of Interstate 90

The Jesus of Pine Ridge contemplated  
this deliverance into his mid-20s  
with a thousand communions of fry bread  
and Gibson White Port wine  
he figured he needed a sturdy chariot  
to lead his people into the promised land  
so he bought a car at the reservation border town  
of Gordon, Nebraska  
traded for a mighty steed  
of faded yellow and rust  
a 1964 Chrysler Newport  
for 260 bucks and 100 dollars in food stamps  
the white guy that sold it to him  
was some kind of pastor nut  
when the deal was done  
the white guy laid his hands on the front hood  
and preached

*“By the power invested in me  
in the name of Jesus Christ  
I cast the demons and Lucifer  
out and away from this vehicle  
why just the other day  
I laid my hands on a roadkill dog  
and brought it back to life”*

The Jesus of Pine Ridge knew he was a false God  
full of dog doo-doo  
tore out of his parking lot

gravel flying like angels in a holy cloud of dust  
ripping the plastic Jesus off the dashboard  
throwing it in the back seat  
laughing and beelining it to the closest liquor store  
every car needs a name  
so he called it his  
Jesus Chrysler

ten years and ten used cars later  
he survived countless crazy dumb luck adventures  
like the time he could fly  
yes, the Jesus of Pine Ridge could fly  
well, more like fall  
off a 300-ft. cliff  
in the Black Hills  
a gust of wind and lost footing  
found him at the bottom of the canyon  
he awoke in a hospital bed  
with broken ribs, shattered pelvis, shattered leg  
and of course the various cuts and bruises

So the Jesus of Pine Ridge can never die  
car accidents  
fights  
jail time  
bad booze and drugs  
even falling off a 300-ft. cliff  
could never kill the Jesus of Pine Ridge

Maybe he died a long time ago  
and this life is his resurrection  
the chosen one

to deliver all us full-bloods to half-breeds  
into salvation  
the Jesus of Pine Ridge

This has been the gospel  
according to Luke Warm Water

## *Reservation Casino*

*(Fetterman's Revenge)*

In the 1860s

U.S. Cavalry Captain Fetterman boasted

“Give me 80 soldiers  
and I could ride through the Sioux Nation victorious”

In 1992

on South Dakota Public Television

the tribal president

and editor-in-chief of a local Indian newspaper

told how the casino would bring

money for programs, for the elders and the youth

money for better health care

money for better education

and stipend money for all tribal members

we would make money off the white tourists

visiting the Reservation

I laughed out loud so hard

my ribs hurt

they had learned how to tell believable lies

to their own people

must have learned well

from the white treaty negotiators of the 1800s

they also learned to line their pockets

Captain Fetterman boasted

“Give me 80 soldiers  
and I could ride through the Sioux Nation victorious”

Drinking free coffee at the Reservation Casino bar

years later and none of those promises had been upheld

a few Indians work as waitstaff and card dealers

wear black dress pants with white ruffle shirts  
 and red bow ties  
 stoic and unsmiling  
 carrying trays and shuffling cards  
 they look like the black-and-white pictures  
 of the early 1900s  
 like Carlisle Indian School  
 children wearing suits and dresses  
 hair cut, in front of buildings  
 no traditional clothing  
 no long hair, nor native lodges  
 in those pictures the children are stoic and unsmiling

Captain Fetterman boasted  
 “Give me 80 soldiers  
 and I could ride through the Sioux Nation victorious”

Drinking more free coffee  
 at the Reservation Casino bar  
 the bartender looks like George Armstrong Custer  
 he flirts with the waitresses  
 the Indian waitresses hiss and hide their smiles  
 at his pick up lines and bad jokes

Looking down at the carpet beneath my stool  
 the colorful swirled patterns  
 look like feathered headdresses  
 I shut my eyes and listen to a chorus  
 of slot machines  
 the cacophony of whistles and bells combine  
 to make the sound  
 of a woman

singing a distant traditional song  
in native tongue  
of sorrow and defeat

Captain Fetterman boasted  
“Give me 80 soldiers  
and I could ride through the Sioux Nation victorious”

Drinking more free coffee  
at the Reservation Casino bar  
I have to take a leak  
as I walk through the casino I notice the patrons  
are mostly Indian  
as if drinking, drugs, greed, and jealousy  
weren't enough vices for Indians  
we can now add gambling to the long list  
of addictions

I look into my plastic tub of nickels  
fish out an Indian Head nickel  
leave it on the bar  
as an insult to the bartender  
who looks like George Armstrong Custer  
not because he looks like Custer  
but because he tells lousy jokes  
I walk back to the Nickel Slots

With coffee in one hand  
tub of nickels in the other  
the ghost of Captain Fetterman  
now seems to be boasting



“Give me 80 slot machines  
and I could ride through the Sioux Nation victorious”

*Epilogue—Captain William Judd Fetterman of the U.S. Cavalry was a Civil War hero and a casualty of the Fetterman Fight (which was named for him). The battle took place in the Powder River country of northern Wyoming on December 21, 1866. Lakota, Arapaho, and Cheyenne killed Fetterman and all the soldiers under his command during the conflict. In earlier years Fetterman supposedly had boasted, “Give me eighty men and I can ride through the whole Sioux Nation victorious.” Ironically eighty men were killed during the Fetterman Fight.*

## *This Is What It Means to Say San Diego, California*

She said, "*Come to San Diego  
and let me run my fingers through  
your long, luxurious hair*"  
she even offered to fuck me half  
this would be a great thing because  
I am half Indian and half white

She offered, "*I will meet you  
halfway in Al-bah-ker-kee*"  
where the last time we met  
which was the first time we met  
immediately adoring each other's hair  
but, my car won't go that far  
I drank up all the bus ticket money  
she sent me

She looks like a Botticelli painting  
her smile passionate  
breasts beautiful  
long flowing hair  
acres of ass

She drinks Spanish Sangria for lunch  
bottles of fine French wine for dinner  
a Gauloises cigarette after each meal

She said, "*Come to San Diego  
read aloud the poetry of Bukowski  
while I run  
my fingers through  
the sound of your voice*"

## *Rapid City Wino Lament*

Stumbling through Rapid City wine country  
brown paper bag  
Mad Dog 20/20 for worse than  
blurred vision that keeps  
poverty out of focus  
Wild Irish Rose for that rotgut  
ride on the green lizard  
The almighty Thunderbird for  
the stars, moon, and the  
night skies of flight on  
winds on wings  
on winds on wings  
my gilded Phoenix brothers  
and sisters that  
you crave to see while  
under  
    the  
        Sixth  
            Street  
bridge

## *On Indian Time*

Remembering big smiles  
a little laughter  
from my mother  
when she would say  
with enthusiasm  
“Better late than never”  
that was 20 years and more ago  
before her passing

Eventually understanding the Lakota significance  
of her repeated quote

Indian Time is lost on white people  
along with those professional Indians  
gauging their lives on promptness and a silk tie

A college friend from the Ft. Berthold Rez  
always tried to get my goat  
telling me aloud within earshot of others  
when I strolled into class late  
“There he is, late for Indian Time”  
rather than hang my head  
in embarrassment shame  
I held my head high  
sticking my chest out proud  
acknowledging him with a big smile  
followed by a little laughter

That old college crony  
got married young  
eventually I lost all contact with him  
his wife made him graduate medical school

she makes all his decisions  
even what silk ties he wears  
he never left North Dakota  
retribution for being an “On-time Indian”

Me, I took Spring Break  
for a couple years at a time  
it took 13 years to finally get  
my undergraduate degree  
an extra year to finish Grad school  
didn't get married until I was 38  
no children of my own, yet

I was born in the old Bennett-Clarkson Hospital  
which was located in west Rapid City  
presently that building  
contains the psychiatric unit of Regional Hospital

In life's full richness of Lakota belief  
I could come full circle  
go completely mad and die  
in the same building I was born in  
perhaps even the same room

No matter how it ends  
someway  
somehow  
I will probably even be late  
for my own funeral

## About the Authors

TREVINO L. BRINGS PLENTY is a poet and musician who lives, works, and writes in Portland, Oregon. Trevino is an American and Native American; a Lakota Indian born on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, South Dakota. Some of his work explores the American Indian identity in American culture and how it has through genealogical history affected indigenous peoples in the twenty-first century. He writes of urban Indian life; it's his subject.

ADRIAN C. LOUIS was born and raised in Nevada and is an enrolled member of the Lovelock Paiute Tribe. From 1984 to 1997, he taught at Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Since 1999 he has been a professor in the Minnesota State University system. He has written ten books of poems and two works of fiction. His novel *Skins* was produced as a feature film in 2002 and his writing awards include Pushcart Prizes and fellowships from the Bush Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Foundation. His recent collection, *Logorrhea* (Northwestern University Press), was a finalist for the 2006 *Los Angeles Times Book Prizes*.

STEVE PACHECO is Mdewakanton Dakota from the Lower Sioux Indian Community near Morton, Minnesota. This small reservation, located in southwestern Minnesota, is where Steve resides. He works as an academic and guidance counselor/advocate for high school kids from his community. Some of his previous experiences include teaching, working for tribal government, and dealing blackjack at the casino. Visit [www.dakotacamp.com](http://www.dakotacamp.com) for more on Steve Pacheco.

The poet known as LUKE WARM WATER was born and raised in Rapid City, South Dakota, and is an Oglala Lakota (Sioux). He has won Poetry Slam competitions from Oregon to Germany. In 2005, he was

awarded an Archibald Bush Foundation individual artist fellowship in literature. Recent poetry books include *Iktomi's Uprising* (2007) and *On Indian Time* (2005).

JOEL WATERS, an Oglala Sioux, was born on the Rosebud Reservation and was raised there and on the Pine Ridge Reservation. He is currently attending the University of South Dakota as an English major. His works have appeared in *Red Ink Magazine*, *Survivorship Quarterly*, and *The Vermillion Literary Project*. His poetry can also be found in the anthologies *Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing* (2003) and *Eating Fire, Tasting Blood: Breaking the Great Silence of the American Indian Holocaust* (2006).