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Bear Butte

Wind talks to me

whispers
secrets through
shy

pine-covered lips

speaks of Sioux
and holy
ways

long winters
full of deer trails

prayers drifted
as winged
seeds

cones tumbled through
thick branches

thunking the ground
to roll downhill

propagating
another
set

of possibilities

—Sheryl L. Nelms

Sheryl L. Nelms is an insurance adjuster, a painter, a weaver, and an old dirt biker. Her eighth book *Tap Dancing on My Brain* is forthcoming from Haley's Press.

Navajo Meltdown

dust

devils swirl

sift over
siliconed grass

as heat
beats

chrome dents
across desert
dunes

like a slim
swarm of silvered

break-dancers

earth
walking

—*Sheryl L. Nelms*

Old Charlie

he always made me wonder

eyes crow-footed from sun
on snow

body slumped
from slack times

he lived
out there on
the Pine Ridge Reservation

in a gutted '49 Ford

army blankets on the floorboard
made his bed

Sunkist orange crate
along the door
held flour and sugar and
Annie Green Springs

Coleman stove
in the hump
of the trunk
warmed his food
and body

and up front
floor to windshield
a raw pine-board
bookcase
bulged
with Miller and Mitchner
and Freud

—Sheryl L. Nelms

Snake Rider*for Eagle Medicine & the People of the sun*

I am
the rider of the snake

winged upon the throngs of the canyon updraft,
slick clawed by cold blasts of wind,
baked into a flag by children of the sun.

Plucked him free from the cactus shade
like snapping a blade of grass;
I blow the upturned fangs away with
a flapping of my span,
like a bridge
across a river run dry,
gated, tolled, and delayed.

They look for us in the trunks
and near the torn down, broken fences,
but they don't look up

to see

something in the sky
looking down
with eyes hard as diamonds.

riding a snake
along the wind.

—Lorenzo Sh@dow.Sky/Gonzalez

Lorenzo Sh@dow.Sky/Gonzalez (Navajo/Apache) won the 1995 American Writer's Program Intro Award for poetry and had the pleasure of opening for MTV's Spoken Word Tour during the Oregon performance. He is an avid "cyberskin"—an American Indian on the Internet—and he makes his living as a technical writer in Los Angeles.

Math Test

In the beginning
there were 1,000.

100 fell to noxious plumes of gunsmoke.
200 dropped out, couldn't hack the bullshit curriculum,
got caught in the cage.
100 liked the crack pipe
and I really don't blame 'em.

Yet, 600 graduated—despite their age.

100 of them went to college;
75 couldn't spell or act assimilated,
so they wuz forced to quit.
6 cracked books at Community C
7 flipped burgers at Mickey D's.
yet 12 wise men still managed
to hold a degree...highly.

Say 4 stuck out for a Master's,
and a quarter of them became an MD,
and that single one couldn't teach
the next 1,000—despite all their desperate pleas....

33 poked AIDS into their veins,
14 sat and stuffed their heart into a bottle of wine,
77 got busted holding up a liquor store or 7-11,
22 got dropped by a 44 or a 9.
It's the "little" disasters that kill
all our dreams of heaven.

40 drank a 40 & got knocked up
by 40 more.
103 sling their foodstamps for half price on the street
just to score another vial,
while 29 sit around their momma's house pointin'
a remote at a TV.

None of them will die
draped in the splendor of old age, smothered with grand kids.

So you tell me.... What does all this equal?

—Lorenzo Sh@dow.Sky/Gonzalez

The Joke

Maybe it was the carpet of roaches, or the schoolmates who laughed at my K-Mart special clothes, or my American Government teacher Freshman year, when he told me in front of the whole class that I would never amount to anything. Or maybe it was when my first love got married...to someone else, even though we weren't through yet. Or maybe it was the lack of health insurance and the mysterious aches and pains, the dead faces of those people I loved, the way we couldn't afford Body Glove or Izod, the 40-minute bus ride to the white side of town, the dead body lying in the weeds, my soul staring at me from the bottom of that bottle, the false visions on that yin yang tab, the car crash, the stab wound, sucking the priest's dick, wishing I had sang in the choir...

Maybe it was finding out dad was just another liar, the fist fights, the sickness that took her from us, my lack of rights when the cops bent me over that hood like a good little 15-year-old, slapping my nose against metal and brick. Perhaps it was the living from paycheck to paycheck, dad's electrocution, or the faded color of the food stamps and the oil in the government peanut butter. And what the hell is Farina, anyway? Some days it might have been the birthday parties with no gifts, the X-mas when the lights weren't on. The bankruptcy and the land tainted with cadmium and arsenic, and spic, nigger, faggot, redskin! Losing the house, losing the car, seeing mom's face staring at the repo man, the stars in her eyes...fading. *Pelon*, my cousin, thrown in jail for blowing away some *vato* who came at him with a baseball bat. Being so hungry I never shat. The porcelain tiger tossed at my head, pieces getting caught in my hair. The broken glass, the steak knife stabbed in the wall. Belts like whips and even the tickling. The tickling, until my soul cried to heaven, unable to get away, laughing and crying all at once.

Maybe it was this
that killed my sense of humor dead?

—Lorenzo Sh@dow.Sky/Gonzalez

How

After the revolution...maybe before,
get yr jackhammer & yr dream,
meet me at Mt. Rushmore.

Here's *YOUR* resolution: your bodybag's a reservation.
Made my decision, time to make my incision,
put some scars on the face of full-blown derision.

Custer was a one night stand.
I want the long-term invasion without lube
where I own the handcuffs, the nightsticks, chains, whips....
where it's *my* chance to be rude.

Got a redskin nigga tellin' it like it is!
no slip of the tongue, no plop plop fizz fizz
what a relief it is
from this societal psychosis,
escapin' the hopes of ill-fated diagnosis, slidin' down the tube
another drug in a syringe, everyone knows this.

We'll make Washington the Oglala chief, American Horse;
Jefferson can be Harriet Tubbman (he was fond of black women);
and there's enough stone on Roosevelt's face to form a convincing
Geronimo,
ya know. Or maybe Rosa Parks, sitting in defiance.

Abe can stay abe.
Affirmative Action, equal representation, tokenism, all that shit.

Not an alien, an outcast, or a cur, just standing on the land of
my ancestors, tellin' dream stories full of
self-destructive glee. Counting coup against my enemy:
American Dream.

Learned to live with my ghosts.
I've been a charming host long too long.
Go home.

Burning down the liquor stores first,
hittin' up gun shops for miles around,
diggin' holes in the ground, like a mole, waitin'.
Medicine man lays a curse as I expect the worst.
Ain't gonna wait to see the white of your lies,
gonna ignore yr cries and my own.

Learned to eat hate in the place of government food.
 Better nourishment for this pissed soul.
 Edit my speech for signs of forgiveness.
 Bear Witness (My other indian name).
 Discredit the collegiate discourse they use to train, they use
 to tame, they use to lay claim of your casino.

Kinky Apache to the bone. Stake ya out over anthills in the sun & I aint
 done yet!
 Pour honey on your belly till you're all wet.

You are only now
 just learning

How.

—Lorenzo Sh@dow.Sky/Gonzalez

Vanishing River *for mother & father*

let me sing to you like water
 sneaking trickster fingers
 down land. This river you
 visited echoes
 my anger, sinking
 inward with every trickle
 into the heart
 of *our* world, wandering down
 long trails of tears, under the
 reservations, beneath drunken cities
 of night, always hidden, like sad faces
 behind ceremonial masks, finally
 rising several miles along
 this warpath, like my temper, my cheek
 bones, my arrow shot at
 god, seeping past
 a people playing disappearing games
 with death. & we shall return
 to sip from this cold water,
 as long as we remember—
 as long as we will
 wait.

—Lorenzo Sh@dow.Sky/Gonzalez

Three Haiku

Smoking peacepipes, the
Indians and white eyes salivate
Puff negative clouds.

White bloodshot eyes scream
charging down the hill towards
Black eyes riding up.

The iron horse wails on
steel hooves of thunder as the
God of storms follow.

—Tom Phelan

**Independence Day
(The Clouds this Morning)**

All night we heard the screaming.
We heard deer scattering and the steel
chirping wheels moving through the underbrush
as a bear rolling over at play.

We heard the snare drum cracking its tin repetition,
burning flutes raised and the distant boom, screeching
of shot over the field (under soot clouds hiding the moon).

We saw flash above flash the red-streaking prongs, long
white knives and twisted fire-branches burning 'cross the sky.

We heard the gasps and death-moans announcing freedom in the clash of
ball and razor.

And at first light,
we held council down by the lake clearing.
We gathered silently by the wavering fires
luring dawn up from its sleeping waters.

And the clouds this morning:
lined with a jaundiced stain, spreading
iron beds of dense cannon smoke—
and moving on those leaden breezes,
the hot musk of a beast, loosened.

—Gary Gamboa

Angels

Close-
shorn hair
a uniform of good
proper clothes
a mask of sandalwood
perfume, and pockets full
of change
to give

the boy
who throws back coins
bison strong,
eyes black as boiling pitch,
who nonchalantly grabs one knee
and turns

a death song
to the broken height of sky
in want of moon;

panting the liquid breaths
of wrestlers
in stalemate,
wipe blood flecks
from your open face,
a ceremony of immutable evils
free and humming the air
before mountains' slow shifting
granite spines

groan,
and begin.

—Michael Schlemper

Michael Schlemper teaches art at Red Lake Reservation High School and is currently pursuing degrees in creative writing and education at Moorhead and Bemidji state universities. In 1999, he was named the winner of the Loft Literary Center's national prize in fiction by writer Jonis Agee, and his short story, "Lord, I Wanna Be More Indian in My Heart" will be published in an upcoming edition of *Waterstone*.

Whiteout

The intersection of Paul Bunyan
and Chief Bemidji was full of grey slush
spun me around
like teaching art in a room with a broken clock
unable to keep a wristwatch running
always checking for what is never there,
my name on the cut list.

We are all in this bus together:
the kids, excited about a day off
seeing artwork, eating McDonald's,
some planning to sneak away
into the casino for the thrill of cards
video games of chance
and me, remembering
the late March blizzard
I had just crept through
until the rez line
where there was no snow,
just air and wet pavement,
and our driver, beginning to believe me,
talking Anishinaabe over the radio
to other drivers, saying,
Niwanishin omaa biiwang,
another answering,
Aw, we'll make it,
in English.

We are in the middle of it,
our collective breath condensing
on the glass all around
between us and the storm.
The driver points all fans toward his windshield.
The wipers have iced up,
drag wet arcs through frost
monochromatic rainbows
changing in time
to the beat of the drum
from the tape deck
powwow music from last summer
when this man driving
sang me into the circle
and accepted a blanket,
after wiping the sweat from his face and hands.

The kids are laughing, some passing
the video poker game from seat to seat.
I count five universities
attended in eight years
to bring me to this place,
a plan to teach English once,
grade six classes of papers and write
the Great American Novel,
before the wheels fall off the edge
of this slick white road,
and the bus swerves back and forth.
I don't know about this,
the driver says to me,
in the mirror. I nod.
The thought of selling
the house in town
moving into a trailer
in the woods, giving up
new clothes and cable
makes me unreasonably happy.
As the bus turns around,
I don't have to explain.
We are going home.

—*Michael Schlemper*

Cheyenne Reservation at Sunset

We were cautioned, oddly enough by a man half-Sioux,
to be extremely vigilant when visiting the reservations
which he, himself, described as urban ghettos scattered on the prairie.

He said the Crow, Sioux and Cheyenne,
given their natural propensity for addiction,
hadn't a prayer when flooded with booze or gambling.

Driving deep into the Cheyenne Reservation of Montana,
we noticed how the government-issue residences,
hardly more substantial than travel trailers,

marred the rolling Montana prairie
like thrown together pop art monuments.
Nearing the reservation's western boundary,

having lost all hope of witnessing
even a semblance of authentic cultural beauty,
we saw to our far left a large number

of vehicles parked on a sun-splashed hillside
and a crowd of Cheyenne, mesmerized
in a private ritual of fire, chant and dance,

circling what was left of their heritage,
their pickups blanketing the vast prairie
like sculptures of brightly painted buffalo.

—Larry D. Thomas

Old Crow

When we got there it was empty,
sunlit through rain-streaked windowpanes,
the drab cafe above the casino
on the Crow Reservation of Montana.

Eventually, an old Crow woman appeared,
calm as a blade of buffalo grass,
to take our order of a well-done hamburger,
an Indian taco and a side order of fry bread.

Her teenaged daughter served us water.
A print of a Crow warrior,
his face masked with black paint,
hung in the shadows on the back wall.

When at last we got our meal,
my friend requested hot sauce for his taco.
The sauce came after the taco was two-thirds eaten.
Though low-keyed, the Crow were quietly friendly.

We waited several more minutes at the register.
One would have thought the Crow could care less
whether we paid for the food.
The Crow had plenty of time.

As we left, I glanced at the old woman.
Our eyes met, and she managed,
as if in slow motion, a faint smile.
An old crow fluttered in the space between her teeth.

—*Larry D. Thomas*

Fort Davis

The man hobbles to the flagpole,
gazes at the tattered patch of stars
flapping in the wind,

scans the organ-pipe-spires
behind the row of dilapidated barracks,
spires red as the Texas Madrone,
bleeding from the wounds of the Mescalero
and Buffalo Soldier.

He listens to taps resonating
in the mountainous fortress,
the cacophony of shuffling horses,
rolling caissons, and
cavalrymen gathering their gear
for an early start.

He tastes the leather and cordite,
feels the thunder of artillery
in his heart.

—Gerald R. Wheeler

Seventh Cavalry Monument in November

Huddled on a high ridge,
and scattered on the plain
overlooking blazing yellow cottonwoods
hiding the Little Big Horn River,

white marble slabs
rise like Moses's Tablets
above the tall golden grass,
as if expelled by earth's caretaker,

creating a fissure
erupting black haze,
ghostly, painted faces
chanting war whoops,

and the sounds of stone crushing bone,
muffled explosions,
attacking bees,
cries of reeling, wounded horses,

and the last clicks of hammers of empty Colts
fired by 210 screaming "Bluecoats,"
led into darkness by a General
searching for glory,

never to grow old,

their hacked, naked bodies
gleaming in the bright afternoon sun,
sacrificed to Wasichus'
lust for land and gold.

—Gerald R. Wheeler

Fort Sumner, New Mexico

"You can hold it," the ranger said
as he eyed a replica of the rifle

that oppressed 8000 Navaho
and 500 Mescalero Apache

on sacred ground in 1863
along the Pecos River.

He returned the rifle to its rack, studied the gallery
of atrocities inflicted on the native dispossessed,

then walked in the tall grass and ruins,

heard the chants of hunger, the cries of huddled children,
and cursing guards assigned to hell's outpost.

When 3000 perished, and guards went AWOL by the score,
the government let the prisoners go,

sent the soldiers to fight another war.

—Gerald R. Wheeler

Memory on a Rainy Day*Written at Jemez Pueblo, 1998*

The sky outside my city apartment
is sodden with rain,
and I remember
how the rain once sounded
on our tin roofs
in New Mexico,
light-years ago
when there were still doves nesting
under the eaves,
—when line-dried laundry
smelled of sage and lavender
and the piñon smoke
curled past the Pueblo,
past pink tamarisks
by the river.

My soul returns
like a wounded spirit,
half of me missing,
to see the shadows dancing
on the moon
and remember arrowheads
lost in the sand.

—*Anne Wilson*

Anne Wilson, who lived just outside the Jemez Indian Reservation in New Mexico for nearly a decade of her life, has gained recognition since 1996 in dozens of literary journals and anthologies. She teaches poetry at the University of California, San Diego and has produced two plays.

White Sage/Black Sage*Written at Jemez Pueblo, 1998*

White sage, black sage,
osha root gathered
before the dawn;
herbs for smudge sticks
dried in the storeroom,
tied with embroidery silk
for burning.
Red chili, green chili—
green for roasting,
savory on fry-bread,
pungent in stews;
red for drying in *nistras*
on sun-baked adobe,
thick for winter sauces.
Cedar smoke, piñon smoke,
piñon nuts golden-roasted,
their memory melts in my mouth
like butter.
Smoke scent lingers
like arcane secrets
rediscovered
by New World pharaohs.
Lemon grass stalks
nod by the river.
Old women acknowledge them
in passing.

—Anne Wilson

Maybe Not

In 1704, Puritan clergyman John Williams and his family were captured during a French and Indian raid on Deerfield, Massachusetts. While Williams and his son Stephen returned to white society, Williams' daughter Eunice was adopted by Mohawks and married Arosen, a Native man. When offered the opportunity to leave her new relations, Eunice Williams refused, saying simply, "Maybe Not."

John Williams

All of my dreams end in Eunice.
 I rescue her thousands of times in my sleep.
 Only then, I am brave.
 Only then, I am cunning,
 Fed on locusts and honey.
 Wielding the bones of a donkey,
 I release my daughter from these Philistines,
 Tear down wooded walls with the shout of my sermon.
 My victories end with the taking of heads.

When I wake,
 There is only Patience,
 Our weary mule.
 Her jawbone is better left where it is.

My new wife rarely moves in the night.
 She has no memories of arrows.
 What remains of my children rests in straight lines,
 Leaving room for Eunice.
 I fear she thinks in circles.

I pray and I pace and I preach to the masses,
 Find myself called redeemed by Mather.
 Yet
 My foes cannot spell brimstone,
 Have no more fear of Hell than of cotton or weeds.
 Or me.
 Despite my ecclesiastical tantrums,
 The only spoils of this war are phantoms.

Dawn Karima Pettigrew (Cherokee/Creek/Chickasaw/Choctaw) is currently enrolled as a doctoral student at the University of Kentucky. An ordained minister, Reverend Pettigrew serves the people of the Qualla Boundary Cherokee Reservation as the pastor of Cherokee Christian Church.

Stephen Williams

You've plenty of gall, new brother Arosen.
 We were children who ruled this New World from the womb,
 Like David, that man after God's own heart,
 Who pleased Heav'n so much He appointed him king.
 All that winning and dancing and severing heads,
 He couldn't help not being the kind of father
 Who could be careful for what he sired.
 They tell us you're a prince, too,
 Vainly adorned in your beads and your feathers,
 Broiling the vanquished with fires on stakes,
 Developing an appetite for sisters,
 Tearing open their bodies with filed teeth and with claws,
 Ripping away the Puritan, modest, dresses,
 Biting the English from the tips of their tongues,
 Bloodying them with the taint of brown.
 Now,
 If I had been born fierce, I would take your life,
 An eye for an eye, I should make you blind—
 In both—
 And make my father love me.
 By liberating Eunice,
 I could make myself king.
 But
 Not being willing to hang from the trees,
 Preferring not to be served in gravy,
 I'd just as soon wait to inherit the kingdom,
 To buy back our Eunice with hammered round silver,
 Thirty pieces in broken vessels.
 Until then, I despise you and wait in dust and ashes.

Eunice Williams

How I changed first is that my feet became wider,
 Splayed and broad set free from your shoes.
 I remember my tongue thickened, too,
 Liberated from speaking so much sin and judgment.

I can make only round sounds now,
 The kind that use the flat of the tongue,
 Pucker the mouth into the kissing of wind,
 The type that cross your ears like water,
 And settle somewhere deep inside you.

No.

Go.

Alone.

This is home.

—Dawn Karima Pettigrew

Minnesota Sorry Song
(honey redpaint singing northern style)

my apologies smell of bleach,
sometimes of fatback,
more often of lye,
burning tears from slanted eyes,
falling, filling garage-sale pitchers
with
sweet red kool-aid, blushing sorry,
gritty with sugar, the way you like it,
lukewarm made with cold well water,
left to sit, courting the flour,
fried into bread
puffy with air,
enough grease to oil a promise,
the only antidote for shame.

my remorse lights your cigarette,
you gave up fourteen weeks ago.
ash leaves the shade I fear love is.

sorry helps me hang the wash,
folds flannel and hearts into lines and angles,
starches your shirts with compensation,
irons conviction in the creases of sheets.

look in your pocket, the left one, and find
i sewed it back in a straight line.
with a broken needle and what's left of the thimble,
i tied a knot of good intentions.

take my apologies in your hands,
penance made good outlasts all objections,
lift the blanket, murmur for home,
take my place on the side I warmed,
watch me shiver my regret.

From now on, every day is Lent.

—Dawn Karima Pettigrew

Laguna Pueblo Dream

the crush of old sky
is a boundless void
singing the wait
 of winter

on & on
a banished moon
weed-plagued moccasin trails
old battle scars
unforgotten
on the gentle wind

the sun bleeds warmth
all now is quiet
yesterday
is best
gone

—*Maya Quintero*

Hierarchy

first thing *mi papi* taught me
was not to play
with *los gringos*
“you know how
they can get”
he said

this white kid
at school & me
played ball some nights
when the firebugs flew wild
& our folks fucking
all sweaty and loud
in their squeaky beds

someone must’ve told
because one day
mi papi yelled
“why don’t we play with *gringos*?”
a quiz & I failed
earning a beery-handed
smack right bare
across my face

“I don’t like correcting you”
he said “but let the damn *gringos*
do their damn own thing—
that’s just how it is”

now I don’t play
ball with no one—
I lay around
in stinking tar heat
& watch the empty store
that used to be a Sears
crumble

—*Maya Quintero*