

# 3 NATIONS ANTHOLOGY

Native, Canadian & New England Writers

Edited by Valerie Lawson

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## This That This

Listen: Before iron, before The Cross and The Book. Before masts.  
This black stone sluiced with fog. A whale sleeping.

In the black bowl, where the stars live, deer, wolf, rabbit whorl with  
the hunter until first light walks the tide. Insinuates through fog.  
Traces beach rock. Sweeps this black, glistening stone. A whale  
sleeping.

First light warms this hand that pecks and carves this story. How  
deer and bear fell into the arms of earth. How the people ate until  
they were ready to sing.

This is a story. Many people dancing. This story has a song. Has  
smoke rising, clarifying spruce and pine. This is not a dream. Stone  
claps stone. This is a story of arrival and going back. Of deer and  
bear falling to earth. Of masts.

Before iron. Stone claps stone, a declaration into this black rock.

—Elizabeth Sprague

Super moon, rising  
over lichen-swathed headstones,  
faces down the sun.

—Danielle Woerner

## Water/Nebi

*... this is the river I belong to...*

Polin, Abenaki leader 1739

We breathe  
the traveling clouds  
and drink what falls  
glistening from cliffs  
and into whirlpool  
basins carved in granite  
on its way back to sky

water me  
glisten me  
carve and  
whirlpool me  
cascade me  
white water me  
sing me babble me  
pool me pond me  
swamp me  
bog me  
trout and salmon me  
frog and dragonfly me  
loon and otter me

breathe me  
the humid sky  
while leaves  
gather pools  
of summer air

*Nebi we say  
wligonebi  
the water is good*

—Cheryl Savageau

## Tribal/State Relations in the State of Maine USA

Donna M. Loring

“Circle the wagons!” is a phrase I learned watching the old western movies on TV when I was a kid. It was done to protect the white people—who were moving west (to steal Indian land)—from those vicious savages. The savages were to be eliminated in any way possible because they were an impediment to white progress. No thought was given to the fact that the Indian people were actual human beings with families and a need to preserve their own way of life.

On May 19th, 2015, I listened to the Judiciary Public hearing on five Indian bills.

- **L.D. 239**, a proposal to create a permanent Wabanaki law enforcement seat on the board of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy.
- **L.D. 267**, a proposal to implement the recommendations of the Maine-Wabanaki State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- **L.D. 268**, a proposal to give tribal courts jurisdiction over cases involving Indian women who are physically abused by non-Indian men.
- **L.D. 893**, requiring the state to print the section of the state constitution outlining Maine’s obligations toward Indian tribes under a 1794 treaty with Massachusetts.
- **L.D. 1094**, a proposal to recognize the governmental powers of the Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Nation.

The thought of “Circle the Wagons!” came to mind. The committee circled the wagons on every single bill. There was no way any of those Indian bills were going to make it through committee. I know this because I was a committee member representing the Penobscot nation for nine years. I know how things work.

The awful truth is these committee members see the Tribes as foreigners (A Nation within a Nation) or even just the enemy impeding the State’s progress. They see us this way because they do not know any better. They are trying to do the right thing for the “Common Good” They were never educated in Tribal-State Relations. They know nothing about the Land Claims Settlement Act, and yet they are expected to make policy decisions on that document. It’s like asking a carpenter to do heart surgery!

My thoughts went back to the “Circle the wagons!” cry. Two worlds collided back in those times and the Indian world, as we knew it was blown apart like so many little pieces of shattered glass. We have tried to piece those shards back together ever since. It is almost impossible to do when every tool we have is being taken away from us. I wondered if these committee members knew anything of the Tribes contribution to this State and our Country. The years of loyalty the Tribes had given them are extraordinary in and of themselves.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote: “Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shore, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles over racial supremacy. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films, our drama, our folklore all exalt it. Our children are still taught to respect the violence which reduced a red-skinned people of an earlier culture into a few fragmented groups herded into impoverished reservations.”

Even given the legacy that Dr. King refers to, the sad facts are

these: Despite the horrific treatment we have endured from the white majority culture over the centuries of genocidal policies we have never lost our love for this land or this Country. We have fought in every war this Country has been in and fought valiantly! Our patriotic record speaks for itself. Native American soldiers have fought to protect the rights and freedoms of every United States Citizen in this Country. We love this Country—it is ours and we are one with it. We've shed our blood for it and paid the ultimate price many times over—more so than any other race. Don't you ever forget it!

We are United States citizens, we are Maine citizens and yes, we are Tribal citizens. Maine Tribes are being kept in poverty by the ignorance of our policy makers in Augusta. They don't seem to want to learn about this relationship except via the Attorney General's Office, which has done everything in its power to isolate us from society.

We are not foreigners in our own land. We are not the enemy. Stop circling the wagons. We have earned our citizenship.

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## Over the Wall

Dan Crowfeather McIsaac

There was a time, more years ago than I care to count, when I was going through Basic Training after joining the Armed Forces. As part of our training, we had to run the "Confidence" course—military speak for an obstacle course. Typical of such courses, ours had a very high wooden wall, which was deliberately made much too high for any but the strongest and most agile jumpers to climb alone. Like so many other things in Basic Training, the purpose of this obstacle was to teach us about teamwork. Here's how it worked: the first two to reach the wall boosted the third person until they could reach the top. The third person then stayed at the top of the wall, reaching down to grab the hand of the next person as they were boosted up, and helping them climb to the top. As the helpers tired, they were relieved by others, who would continue to help until everyone had succeeded in climbing over this wall. Some had an easier time than others, but nobody was left behind. This activity, and others like it, were what built the unique sense of brotherhood that all of us who served are privileged to share. We learned to depend on our brothers-in-arms, and they learned to depend on us.

Many years ago, it was the same in First Nation cultures. Every person would readily help their brother or sister, and enjoyed the security of knowing that they could count on that help being returned if they needed it. Every person felt that sense of brotherhood or sisterhood with the others in their village or clan. Everyone understood, without having to try, that you yourself get ahead when you help your neighbour get ahead. Finally, when the first Europeans arrived on these shores, that same helping hand was extended to them, because to do any less was simply unthink-

able. Unfortunately for the Red Man, most Europeans came from cultures that focused on the individual rather than the group, and dog-eat-dog became the new world order.

Time has passed, and history has seen terrible things done to the first peoples of this land. And those things have taken a terrible toll, because they have destroyed our proud tradition of working together as a team. History seems to have taught us that if someone else begins to succeed, we somehow lose something in their success. When someone begins to rise above the years of oppression and pain, and begins to reach for a way out of the trap, the people around take notice. However, rather than helping, it seems that all too often petty jealousies surface, and the whispering starts, and in most cases the person is dragged back just as they have put their hand to the top of the wall. This has happened for so long that most no longer even try, preferring to live their lives in pain and hopelessness rather than take the risk of being outcasts in their own societies. In the end, only the strongest and most agile manage to free themselves from the walls that have been built around our people.

I believe it is time for a return to one of the oldest and most powerful values of the old cultures. It is time for us to realize that we can help the person next to us without lessening ourselves. We need to remember that by helping others to rise, we help ourselves to rise as well. As I learned so long ago in Boot Camp, only teamwork will help us to overcome the biggest obstacles that surround us. We can no longer wait for help from the Government, or indeed from anyone else—we must all look within, and learn what strengths we have to share, and help ourselves to do what must be done. If we see someone who is trying to make something of themselves despite the barriers imposed by the outside world, we need to support them in any way we can, and depend on them to reach back and help us when they are able.

I am no blind optimist. I know that sometimes the ones who reach the top of the wall will simply vault over and be gone, with no thought for those left behind. However, I also know that, if enough people choose to believe in each other, and choose to continue that belief even when they are disappointed, the years of harm can be undone and we can once again stand strong together. We can create a

new way of thinking, a new concept of what is normal behaviour. We can set a good example for our youth, and teach them to work towards an end to the pain and hopelessness. This end will not come through Government money or from outside agencies; this end will come from the strength of character that is ours by birthright, but which we seem to have misplaced somewhere among the gambling tables and empty bottles.

My brothers and sisters, the walls are everywhere, and they are very high indeed. But they are not too high if we work together. Come—give me your hand....

*Taho! Msit No'kmaq*