

Introduction

Siobhan Senier

DAWNLAND VOICES

AN ANTHOLOGY OF INDIGENOUS
WRITING FROM NEW ENGLAND

Edited by Siobhan Senier

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN AND LONDON

2014

Years ago, when I started thinking about this anthology, I had what I thought was a simple, practical need. I was hired to teach Native American literature, first at the University of Maine and then at the University of New Hampshire, and I wanted to include local authors. But that literature was maddeningly hard to find. Aside from two repeatedly mentioned early writers—the Mohegan minister Samson Occom and Pequot minister-activist William Apess—I kept hearing that “there just aren’t any” Native American authors in this area.

Now, I had been taught in graduate school that “there just aren’t any” is almost always a lie. So I kept looking. I did have company: like-minded colleagues, including Margaret Lukens at the University of Maine and Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), now at Amherst College.¹ With their help, I started finding writers: dazzling, contemporary poets like Cheryl Savageau (Abenaki), inventive novelists like John Christian Hopkins (Narragansett), powerful essayists like Donna Loring (Penobscot), and intriguing earlier writers like the diarist Fidelity Fielding (Mohegan) and the historian Lewis Mitchell (Passamaquoddy). I found, in fact, more indigenous New England authors than I could read, teach, or even count. More to the point, I found more than I could keep xeroxing for my classes, since works by these writers were very often out of print or unpublished. Hence the need for a ready compendium.

The idea of an anthology like this was apparently a new one. Acquaintances and even well-informed colleagues were usually surprised (“There’s Native American literature *here?*”). Avid readers have at least heard that Native American literature exists, but some believe “it was all oral tradition.” If they have read any Native authors at all, these are almost always from the Southwest or Great Plains. On shelves labeled “American Indian” in your local bookstore, writers from New England are almost always neglected.² That neglect, I soon learned, has deep historic and political roots and does damaging work to the indigenous people who still live here.

The myth of the “vanishing Indian” is very old, and by no means peculiar to New England: it has permeated American culture from *The Last of the Mohicans* to *Dances with Wolves*. But the myth exercises special force east of the Mississippi, where colonization happened earliest; and it takes a particular shape in New England, where European settlers have, from the beginning, been keen to install themselves as the “first” Americans.³ Yankees like to believe that Native people “died off” (or “lost”) early on and that those who didn’t die were “assimilated” or have “very little real Indian blood.” Few citizens are educated about the barrage of state and federal policies that have been consistently enacted and retooled, to this very day, to terminate Native communities in New England as well as across the rest of the United States: educational policies removing Native children from their homes and penalizing Native language use; land use policies aimed at breaking up Native collectivities; bizarre blood-quantum requirements claiming that Native identity “dissolves” with intermarriage.⁴

The writers in *Dawnland Voices* describe and challenge those policies in their own writings, appropriately enough, because writing has always been a key colonial tool. Historian Jill Lepore, for example, has traced how the earliest Puritan historians narrated (and renarrated) King Philip’s War (1675–76) as the effective “end” of Native presence in the Northeast. In that same century, the state of Connecticut made it illegal even to use the name “Pequot” (O’Brien 31); other states followed with similar “detrribalization” laws.⁵ Soon, New England census and other records began recasting indigenous people as “colored,” “mulatto,” “French”—anything but “Indian”—in what some Native people call “pencil genocide.”⁶ And then local and town historians joined the effort. In *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*, Jean O’Brien (Ojibwe) reads hundreds of these town histories from Maine to Rhode Island. Year after year, she finds, local historians eulogized “the last of the tribe”—so enthusiastically and consistently, in fact, that they created a landscape “thickly populated by ‘last’ members of a given ‘race’” (113).

The New England case illustrates why the Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe has called invasion a “structure, not an event” (2). In settler colonialism, the colonizers keep invading: first physically, with war and disease; then culturally and ideologically, with more “humane” attempts to “civilize” indigenous people; and politically and economically, through policies designed to thwart tribal self-governance. As the authors included

below explain, those policies currently take the form of state blockage of tribal economic enterprise (as in Rhode Island) and interference with tribal environmental protection of traditional homelands and waterways (as in Maine). If there is one thing the culturally diverse tribal nations represented in this volume have in common, it is the enduring popular conception that they no longer exist, or that those who would assert their heritage and rights are merely “casino-grubbing” or somehow standing in the way of modern economic “development.”

Dawnland Voices thus joins an ongoing effort to help document and represent Native people’s *continuous presence* in New England.⁷ As you will see throughout this anthology, indigenous New Englanders have had to say it again and again: “We’re still here.”

No anthology ever satisfies all readers, and no anthology is ever complete. But even among readers, teachers, and editors who know these things, anthologies carry a heavy burden. A classroom tome like the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* promises comprehensive coverage. The annual *Best American Poetry* series implies the highest standards of taste, plus national pride. Popular collections like the Chicken Soup series offer feelings of community with other people in similar straits: the grieving, the preteen, the dog lover, even the “executive” or the “prisoner.” We might say, then, that anthologies have a politics, insofar as an anthology on your bookshelf, or your Kindle, does more than “introduce” you to a certain body of literature; an anthology can also confer membership in a particular group or a kind of distinction.

Perhaps this explains why Karen Kilcup, herself a thoughtful anthologist, has said there is no escaping this central fact: “an anthology creates a miniature canon, no matter how resistant the editor is to the vexed notions of goodness and importance” (113). Some anthologies self-consciously try to push back against this canonizing tendency. In *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America*, for instance, poets Joy Harjo (Muscogee) and Gloria Bird (Spokane) included many previously unpublished writers because they wanted specifically to represent women who had made major contributions to their tribal communities. A more recent collection, one that has greatly influenced the volume at hand, is Kristina Bross and Hilary Wyss’s *Early Native Literacies in New England*, which encourages readers to look for Indian

Chief Stephen Augustine

(Tribal Elder)

An elder of the Elsipogtog (Big Cove) First Nation in New Brunswick, Stephen Augustine is a hereditary chief on the Mi'kmaq Grand Council. He also serves as curator of eastern maritime ethnology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec. In 2009 Augustine received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Culture, Heritage, and Spirituality. Of the selection below, he says, "My grandmother, who lived to be one hundred years old, passed this story on to me. This is part of the Mi'kmaq creation story." Chief Augustine wrote it especially for this volume.

Mi'kmaq Creation Story

In Mi'kmaq tradition there are seven levels of creation. These levels correspond to seven stages in the creation of the world. The first level is the act of creation itself. Some people would call it the Creator, but in Mi'kmaq culture it is more about the wonder and unfolding of creation. The word we use is *kisúlk*. This means "you are being created." *Kisúlk* is the Giver of Life.

The second level is the Sun, which we call *Niskam*, or Grandfather. When we stand in the Sun we cast a shadow. The shadow represents the spirits of our ancestors. Grandfather Sun puts spirit into life.

The third level is *Sitqamúk*, Mother Earth. Mother Earth gives us all the necessities of life through the elements of the earth: water, rocks, soils, plants, animals, fish, and so on. Mother Earth sustains life.

The fourth level of creation is *Kluskap*, the First One Who Spoke.³ He is created from a bolt of lightning that hits the surface of Mother Earth. He is made of the elements of the earth: feathers and bone and skin and dirt and grass and sand and pebbles and water. An eagle comes to *Kluskap* with a message from the Giver of Life, Grandfather Sun, and Mother Earth. The eagle tells *Kluskap* that he will be joined by his family, who will help him understand his place in this world.

The first of *Kluskap*'s family to arrive is the Grandmother, *Nukumi*.

She is formed from a rock. She brings wisdom and knowledge. The Grandmother is the fifth level of creation.

The next of *Kluskap*'s family to arrive is the Nephew, *Netawansum*. He is formed from the sweet-smelling grass. He brings strength and can see into the future. The Nephew is the sixth level of creation.

The last of *Kluskap*'s family to arrive is the Mother, *Nikanaptekewisqw*. She is formed from a leaf. She brings love for all her children, so that they will care for one another. She also brings the colours of the world. The Mother is the seventh level of creation.

As each member of his family arrives, *Kluskap* asks his fellow beings—the animals, the fish, and the plants—to sustain the Mi'kmaq peoples. *Kluskap* also calls upon the wind to fan the sparks left by the first bolt of lightning. This gives birth to the Great Spirit Fire. The seven families of the Algonquin peoples are formed from sparks that fly out of this fire and land upon the Earth. The Mi'kmaq are one of these families.

ssipsis

(b. 1941)

ssipsis (Penobscot for "little bird") was born on Indian Island in the Penobscot Nation and is well known for her writing and visual art. Some of her birch-bark etchings are on permanent display at the Penobscot Nation Museum on Indian Island; other works are at the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor. ssipsis has also worked as a social worker and as an editor for the *Maine Indian Newsletter*. The pieces below first appeared in *Molly Molasses and Me*, a book she calls "a collection of living adventures" with her Passamaquoddy friend Georgia Mitchell, and in which she uses a great many Passamaquoddy terms.

Injun Laugh

I'm very glad to be here
And see lots of shiny faces
I come from long way up river
From the aboriginal people's places

I'm supposed to talk about ecology
Environment and tradition
And living the creator's way
Indigenous people's rights, legal fights
And bi-cultural education

I wish I could stay a long time
To talk about those things
But I worry that my place be gone
If long time I stay away

I would get restless and homesick
For my own nation
And I might shrivel up and die
For taste of moose and beaver

So maybe we be done with greeting
And get into the meat/heart of talk
So I can get back to native land

I'm very glad to learn about radiation
That they plant near my reservation
For that means some grow no hair
And their face is bare
And they light up in dark
So we can see who they are
And not shoot for bear

I learn about cyclamates, a chemical sweetener
The hard way

And that was about ten years ago
When a big Mack truck
Dump on reservation
All that soda pop that stores don't want
And so give Injun
They also give Injun diarrhea
And cancer and short life span
But we don't worry that white man
Don't care
Cause we just passing through
And we got better place to go

I laugh when history books say
That white man took Injun land away
Cause I still see land sitting there today
And white man tell us it's written
In their book who own land
Injun still laugh
Cause he no read book
And Injun know who owns land
And it written in Injun book

And white man teach us
In their school all those things

Including golden rule
And Injun laugh
Cause he no fool and he don't want
To be taught like a gol danged mule
And white man get mad
Cause Injun laugh
And they put us in jail
Cause we don't believe their book
But we don't worry
That white man don't care
Cause we just passing through
And we got better place to go
And white man try and try
To find Injun book
He cut down tree
He move mountain
He dig up grave
He look through garbage dump and shell heap
All time looking for Injun book
That prove Injun own land
And Injun just sit there and laugh
Cause white man still can't find Injun book

You know us Injuns walk freely on earth
You see some white folk never touch ground
All time feet is far away from earth
Those white folk never get kiss from earth mother
They got high platform shoes
Then they get in car with fifteen inches of rubber
And they get in car inside ten room house
And they drive in car on five inch of black tar
Out of concrete city
Into country
And back again
And still never touch earth
What they afraid of
They buzz around sky like pigeon

And whizz around ground like chipmunk
Where they going
As you know us Injuns walk freely
You know how much it cost for white man
To walk on Injun land
It cost them plenty
For moccasins that are fifteen deerhides thick
It cost them plenty
For houses that are ten wigwams wide
And it cost them plenty to move car that weighs
One ton boulder yes it cost them plenty

And they need their own river
Cause their skee wun smell⁷
And their mitch i gun stink⁸
And they got to mix it
One skee wun to fifteen miles of river
And they got no room to plant trees
And flowers to take that pollution smell away
Cause they fence in all that short grass
That even a rabbit would starve on
And you wonder why I ask about this white man
If they my brother and sister why they do not like
River, rabbit and blue sky
If they my brother and sister
Then I would say to them
Brother, I don't like some of those things you do
And if you don't stop doing those nasty things
I'm gonna get mad and throw water on you
And if that don't work
I'm gonna throw you into the fire
And if that don't work
I'm gonna tell my mother
And she's gonna ban you
From this side of the river forever

You know us Injuns we got lot of trust
There's the Livermore Savings and Trust

And the Androscoggin Banking and Trust
And the Merrill Trust
Our investment is in good name
So if Maine go broke
You know who to blame

*Gewh Huz*⁹

Recipe for muskrat stew entails more than the preparation of the menu, for it requires a lengthy lesson during a winter afternoon to juggle the native language of Molly Molasses, the Passamaquoddy, around the tongue into repetitive sounds, which sound funny at first, and very formal and then very familiar later on as we start cooking.¹⁰

I have been convinced that the language is music and the speakers sing their words. At the end of this chapter, I have set the recipe for muskrat stew on music paper.

Gewh huz, there is no English equivalent, for the word flows so in tune with the river as it swirls through the rushes that grow on the banks. Imagine the muskrat swimming, searching for the roots, and the river flowing over the glistening black head with its sparkling knowing eyes and the nose wriggling and smelling for the pungent medicine and food. It is said that the roots that the muskrat eats is the medicine which keeps colds and pneumonia at a distance. If one takes this medicine, one will be cured.

I think, if you eat the muskrat you are taking the ancient medicine, which is wholly the life of the muskrat. One cycle touches another. One keeps you in health and the other gathers your medicine. When the trappers bring you the cleaned and skinned muskrat, you are doubly blessed, for you have food and you have medicine.

Of course this is native and wild food. The meat is dark and rich with protein. Fat is there in separate white globules around the haunches, armpits, and stomach if the winter is mild. If the winter is harsh, then the muskrat will be lean and long and all the fat reserves gone. The muskrat will be spicy and smell like the roots it eats and the whole house will be filled with the heavy musk smell.

When cleaning the muskrat, the tail goes into the fire along with the

fat and busy webbed feet that have swum the river, searching for food along the riverbank, digging and pulling roots. Some people like to eat the heads, the tiny succulent tidbits of brain, tongue, and fat cheeks.

When Gwug-gwug (Clarence Francis) and his wife Vi (Violet), came by to eat lunch one day, a respectful silence was felt around the table as the muskrat was eaten. We used our fingers to pry the small bones apart and suck the tiny morsels of meat from the rib cages, which look like a small fish trap. Beside our plates the pile of bones grew larger until at last our appetites were satisfied.

"Um, um, um. . ." Final compliments to the muskrat. Cycles complete, coffee, cigarette, and lunch was done. The recipe that makes the lunch so delicious is such a simple one. The language lesson is more difficult and hardly silent. This is a lesson with much laughter and more stories and lessons within lessons. Molly Molasses is a perfect teacher, with patience and humor. The language must be perfect in pronunciation as well as perfect in understanding. When you learn the language you also learn history, medicine, social graces, conversation, and a sense of humor.

I must watch closely to her mouth and listen carefully with my ears and try very hard to bring those words to my own mouth. Slowly I must know where the sounds come from, the chest or the throat or the tongue or the teeth. With each experiment, I try again to place the sound correctly so it is right to Molly Molasses's ear. It is not enough to write the sound in phonetics or in English, because the sounds come from the whole body and not through tightly closed lips.

*Ge nub ska ze tid psap nig.*¹¹ If you were to read the phonetics, you would not know where the sound hits the right note, so placing the phonetic below the note will show how much higher or lower that sound will be, and how long it will be sounded. I hope.

Donna Loring

(b. 1948)

Donna Loring has had a long and distinguished career: Vietnam veteran, police chief, security director, activist, and politician. Following in the footsteps of John Neptune, Joseph Nicolar, and others, she served as tribal representative to the state legislature for approximately twelve years and has published a memoir about the experience. As tribal representative, she submitted the “Joint Resolution in Support of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (April 15, 2008); Maine was one of the first states to pass a resolution in support of this declaration. Loring authored and sponsored LD 291, described in the article below, which she previously published in the *New England Journal of Higher Education*. This law, which has provided for substantive indigenous input into the way Maine teaches—and thus views—its own history, has fostered many of the contemporary Wabanaki writings in this anthology.

The Dark Ages of Education and a New Hope: Teaching Native American History in Maine Schools

In 2001 I authored legislation that required all public schools in Maine to teach Maine Indian history. On June 14 of that year, Governor Angus King signed “An Act to Require Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine’s Schools” into law—the first of its kind in the United States.

What makes the law unique is its requirement that specific topics be studied, such as: (1) tribal governments and political systems and their relationship with local, state, national, and international governments; (2) Maine Native American cultural systems and the experience of Maine tribal people throughout history; (3) Maine Native American territories; and (4) Maine Native American economic systems.

The most important piece of this legislation was the creation of a Native American History Commission to help schools gather a wide range of materials and resources to implement the law. This led to creation of the Wabanaki Educational Curriculum, which tells the story of the Wabanaki people of Maine from the Wabanaki perspective. It is leading us out of

the “dark ages” of education. “Dark ages” because education has been a two-edged sword for Native people. On one hand, it opened opportunities. On the other, it harmed us physically, psychologically, and spiritually. It inflicted spiritual wounds upon Native people lasting for generations. We call these wounds “Soul Wounds.”

Richard Henry Pratt, who founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879, had a saying, “Kill the Indian and save the man.” The intention was to kill the cultural core within Indian children through boarding-school education and forced assimilation that included prohibitions on speaking their Native language or practicing Native traditional religion. Justification for this came from the notion that Indians were less than human. This view is abundantly evident in the way Indians were depicted by the press at the time. Among many nineteenth-century cartoons of Indians, one in particular comes to mind. It can be found today on the cover of John M. Coward’s book *The Newspaper Indian*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 1999. In this drawing we see a Union soldier who has just shot the Lakota chief Sitting Bull (1831–90). Depicted as half man, half beast, Sitting Bull has clawed hands and a lower body made up of the back end and legs of a buck deer. The caption of the original cartoon reads, “The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves.”

Indians were simply seen as subhuman savages to be disposed of. Thus began Indian education from the white man’s perspective: educate the Indian in white man’s culture and values, and he will become for all intents and purposes a productive member of white society. Indian children were forcibly taken from their mothers and fathers on the reservations and were mentally, physically, psychologically, spiritually, and even sexually abused. Native people call this cultural genocide.

The first off-reservation boarding school in the United States, Carlisle became a model for schools in other locations, which echoed its efforts to forcibly assimilate Native American children. Canada also utilized residential schools, many operated by the Catholic Church. I have seen films and read books on the abuse these schools perpetrated on the Indian children in their effort to “kill the Indian.” I recently read *Out of the Depths* by Isabelle Knockwood, which chronicles the trauma she and other Mi’kmaw children experienced at the Indian Residential School at

Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. It is one of the most powerful accounts I have ever read. Knockwood, who attended the school from 1936 to 1947, writes,

I remember a nun shaking a girl by the shoulders and yelling, "Look at me, look at me" . . . [even though] direct eye contact between child and adult was considered arrogant in the Native culture. We were being forcibly disconnected from everything our parents and elders had taught us. We sang songs in honor of Christopher Columbus who discovered America. Apparently our ancestors had been "discovered" by this white man who was lost on his way to find spices. No one told us that the Hurons shown scalping the missionaries in the textbooks wanted their children to learn and to keep their own Native spirituality and their own land.

In some ways the experience I had in the public and private educational system in the United States was like Knockwood's. I was never abused in the same way as the Indian children who were forced to go to residential schools, but the purpose was the same: to assimilate me into the white man's world. And I have learned well how to walk in that world.

I attended elementary school, junior high school, and one year of high school in Old Town, Maine, a non-Native community just across the river from where I lived on the Penobscot reservation at Indian Island. It was during those years that I learned what it was like to be discriminated against both overtly and subtly. Various students called me a "filthy squaw," and teachers who for the most part ignored me made a point of calling on me to answer questions pertaining to what they thought all Indians should know—such as which paw prints belonged to which animals. When I had enough of being treated like a second-class citizen, I asked my very religious, non-Native grandmother to get me into a religious school. I thought if I went to one of those schools I would be treated better and there would be no discrimination or racism. I was wrong on that count as well.

Like Isabelle Knockwood, I was taught a history centered on white men, such as George Washington and Christopher Columbus. I never had a class on Native American history. I had no sense of my own history or the contributions made to this country by my ancestors. My people and my race were made invisible by the educational system by the simple act of

omission. I find it ironic that the First Nations of this continent not only were made invisible by the educational system but were disadvantaged and discriminated against because of it. I guess you could call the early years of "kill the Indian and save the man" the dark ages of education. Those dark ages have spilled into this century.

The failure to include Native American history in our educational system leads to low self-esteem among Native American students and a lack of respect among their peers. It also contributes to a low retention rate in high schools and colleges. Native Americans graduate high school at lower rates than all other ethnic groups and account for less than 1 percent of college students enrolled in New England, according to national data recently published by the *New England Journal of Higher Education*.¹² But Native American statistics are rarely included. Native people are left out of the history pages and are left out of research and statistics. I read the newspapers and listen to media reports that give statistics about various subjects, such as population growth or health issues. We are simply nonexistent.

Education is supposed to be a shining light of knowledge and a gateway to a better life. Why has this gateway opened only one way for Indian people, forcing us to learn only about white society? By omitting Native history, we continue to cheat countless students—Native and non-Native alike. Indian history is so interwoven into the very fabric of this country, from George Washington and the Revolutionary War through Andrew Jackson, with his Indian termination philosophy and his Indian Removal Act, and Chief Justice John Marshall, whose legal opinions based on the papal bulls "Right of Discovery" and "Manifest Destiny" have kept Native people in poverty because we cannot own our own land. Even though we could not own our own land, we have fought in every war to defend this country. Native people have the highest rate of military service compared to any race in the nation.

Every student in this country needs to know the full story of the First Nations. The Maine Native American History and Culture Act holds great promise for our state. While work to carry it to fruition is ongoing, it has already proven to be one of the most important bills in history for Maine's Native people. Eight years after the bill passed, there has been a renaissance in Native voices through Native-authored books, poetry, art, plays, museum exhibits, and documentary films. The fact that Native

history is required to be taught in public schools in Maine has begun to give Native people a strong, clear voice, a voice that they never had. The state of Maine is slowly learning from these voices.

An honest, truthful, and inclusive educational system needs to emerge from the dark ages and into the light of full knowledge. Native history must be a required subject, not only in public elementary schools but also in colleges across this country. It needs to be part of the core requirement, not just a token program of Native studies or help for Native nations. It is time our story is told and the educational system unlocks that one-way gate and allows us to take our rightful place in the history of this continent. It is the right thing to do, and I guarantee the results will be amazingly powerful and healing.

(2009)

Carol Dana

(b. 1952)

Born and raised on Indian Island, Carol Dana has six children and nine grandchildren. In 2008 she earned her MA in education at the University of Maine. She has devoted years to Penobscot language revitalization, working with linguist Frank Siebert on the Penobscot dictionary project during the 1980s and teaching Penobscot at the Indian Island School during the 1990s. At present she is the cultural historical preservation officer for the Penobscot Nation, where she has helped to produce several workbooks, videos, and other cultural materials. The following poems first appeared in her chapbook *When No One Is Looking*.

Penobscot Home Nation

Penobscot home nation is in the minds and hearts of the people

When he talks them old time tales of hunting, mysteries,
wendigo, and little people,
I know I am home.

When she's making medicine for someone in need,
When every act is done in that spirit,
You forget there was ever such a thing as greed.

When sun warms your body through the heart of the land
And smiles play on our children's faces
You can see the work of Gluscabe's hand . . .

We're Like the Moss on the Rock

We're like the moss on the rock.
A little clump, hanging on for life
at Panampsk.¹³
Will we forever be erased?
No, it is here our footsteps
we must trace

Back to the source.

Why must we die to live, live to die.
Would you want to kill us if we
reclaimed our land,
brought our many husbands, wives
and knives?

*Caribou Lake Winter*¹⁴

Megalibu run, snowflake fly,¹⁵
Forever changing, cold, dry.
In sun we walked a long way
We wanted to drop in our tracks
When every move must count
Life depends on it
Impeccable warrior
Don't speak
Shaman's power

Runs deep
Kthadin, Pamola, Atahando¹⁶
Attean, Susep, Nicola¹⁷
Were people on the move
Who laughed, loved, cried and died
Over eons of time
We're forever grateful to be
from Molasses Molly, Swasson, Susep
Francis, Neptune, and Dani.¹⁸
Here our tree roots grow
Strong and deep.

[Untitled]

Mother of three didn't know
wouldn't show the beginning of discontent.
In her housework sometimes she wondered where he went.
Mother of four knew the pain, when
it was with his old lady he had lain;
Her maternal wounds had hardly healed
when he asked for his pleasure she should yield.
Quickly he left her bed. To hers he went.
He expected and waited for consent.
Mother of five wasn't sure she could keep
hope and love alive.
"I don't care," said her posture, looks and clothes.
The next baby had a sickness which spoke to her
of the preciousness of life.
The sorrow made room for the depth of joy that comes
once you know strife.

Mother of six so haggard yet wise
Mother of six could never surmise
the trial and outcome of one year wanting
to be as free as her partner and as undisturbed.
She walked the coals of questions about the

splitting of a family, a baby or not, an other woman.
The absence of a heart, being, and spirit that once lent
so much strength.
(Which led to the linking of a spirit much greater.)
The crossing of a bridge in so many ways.
Mother of six didn't like going through fire
Mother of six has seen the folly of desire.

[Untitled]

Pensive in her rocking chair
stiff and straight faced.
The hard line of her mouth
I would wait to see crack
To know what was inside.
Sometimes I felt I should hide
from her sternness and harsh ways,
Although there were many days
she would talk and smile with her friends,
passing the while
speaking in Passamaquoddy,¹⁹
their eyes smiling with fun
when directed at me.
I wondered, now what have I done
to amuse them so?
I would be perturbed to no end
for some understanding.
Little did I know the ladies joked
about having fun, teasing, and sex.
They talked about human qualities,
What the neighbors said or done.
We were the age-old stream
of Indian people
Yet I couldn't participate
because of my lack of native language.

Children

Remember when we were kids
playing in our hiding places?
Still Indian Island afforded to us
wide open spaces.
The sun would shine to warm our bodies,
Life was free, beautiful, fun.
Let us not forget! little one.
Sheltered by our family tree
We laughed, played, most free.
Then we look at tomorrow and
the memory is but a patch of sunlight in a storm.

Life appears to be gloomy and dull.
It's a comfort to bring back the child.
To laugh, stop awhile and see
There is wonder.

A Walk to Ktadhin²⁰

I walked an old path along the river
With moon in view and hawks rising
The warm breeze soothed my soul
And pine trees scented our steps in the sun
Sisters we were in strength and spirit
A silent understanding grew up,
Somewhere surrounding our common struggle.

I likened the physical act of our walk
To the spiritual act of everyday steps.
The river sparkled at our laughter.
Crows, hawks and songbirds greeted us.
Pains grew and subsided.
Prayers urged us forward.
Comrades lent help through water, food
and foot massages, coaxing encouragement.

We walked through rural towns
As hot hardtop roads tried to stifle us every day.
Uphill wore out our feet and hearts
Downhill toppled us forward
Bendin' our limbs in a peculiar way.

Endless roads with little people dotting the horizon
Tired, sweating, near hysteria we were.
Everything was funny until the pain came wild-eyed.
Heavy body, so hard to take care of,
Wish I could outwalk you.
Demanding to be fed, relieved, watered, rested
Fighting every step of the way to
Walk away the pain we feel.

Rhonda Frey

(1955–2009)

For many years the only Native American journalist in Maine, Rhonda Frey worked in television, radio, and print. She produced a radio show called *Indigenous Voices* for WERU, a community-supported, noncommercial station in Blue Hill, Maine. She also worked for the Penobscot Nation as a human resources counselor. As an activist, Frey fought to get the word *squaw* banned from public landmarks in Maine with the Offensive Place Names Act. The selection below is from one of two curricula she produced with the Abbe Museum in support of LD 291, An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine's Schools, passed in 1991.

Growing Up with Stereotypes: A Native Woman's Perspective

Growing up, I don't recall hearing we were of a different culture. As a child I would dance in the summers at Chief Poolaw's teepee for the tourists, but even then I thought, "Everyone does this sort of thing in their communities"; this was just a way for me to earn money. Bruce Poolaw claimed to be a chief but wasn't. He would provide us with regalia so we could dance. We would take around a basket for donations. He would try to take half and give us the other half, but whenever his wife, "Princess Watahaso" (also known as Aunt Lu), would find out, she'd give us the other half and tell him, "You make your money on the store, let the children have theirs." We loved Aunt Lu.

I really didn't know color, other than I saw a black person once and told my grandmother. She said, "Tourists"; that was her only explanation of colored people. I also danced traditional dances in the Indian Pageant—again thinking this sort of thing happened in every community. We were trying to raise money for our church. Thousands of people would attend and watch the pageant.

Then there was John Wayne. We used to watch some of the old movies on television. I knew that cowboys and Indians were different, but I didn't

see color. I recall at times I would have a weird feeling at the end of the show, as if something just wasn't right, but I could never put my finger on it. Funny, though, when we played cowboys and Indians as children, nobody wanted to be the Indian, because they always lost; everyone wanted to be cowboys. I watched *The Lone Ranger* a few times, too, and felt that same weird feeling.

My rather rude introduction to the non-Native world occurred in the sixth grade, and I began to see the differences. Luckily for me, I used to walk over to the Herbert Gray School in Old Town for about three summers prior to starting sixth grade, to swim at their pool and spend the day with the local children. They knew me as Rhonda. When I entered St. Mary's School in Old Town there were several of my friends in the same grade and they were good to me. I began to see they didn't treat the other children from Indian Island as nice as they treated me.

After the first two months of school I really encountered my first slap in the face. One of the boys in my grade said that I stole something from him. I looked at him so surprised and said, "No I didn't, why do you say that?" I had always been an honest person and certainly didn't steal. He kept insisting that I did; I told the nuns I didn't. The nuns seemed to believe me, but it bothered me that he said that. I went to him later and asked him why he did that and he said, "Because you were trying to be somebody, I had to show you you're not, I had to put you in your place." I just couldn't understand. I went home and told my mother. She said, "The people over there don't like us." I then began to hear and see the differences; I found out that I was no good, that I was dirty—even though I showered every day or took baths, I was still dirty. I was trash. We were "the Others." I began to watch the "cowboy and Indian shows" with a more critical eye and realized the shows were trying to put us down. I began to resent John Wayne and any other show that depicted Indians. I learned all about the dirty word "prejudice" at a very young age.

Of course, what didn't help was that the Maine Indian Land Claims was at its peak and the banners in the *Bangor Daily News* screamed, "Hey Old Town start packing, the Indians are taking your land." Every time a banner of this sort appeared, or a story came out that was filled with half-truths and exaggerations, we as students in the Old Town school system would pay for it.

In junior high some of the teachers were mean to us. There seemed to

be a double standard; one that was used to grade non-Native work and one that was used to grade Native work. Even the way we were approached, the teachers weren't as nice to us as they were with non-Native students. We were the unwanted children in Old Town. I was one of the best students at Indian Island, and within two years I went down to the lowest division in the eighth grade because it was so difficult to deal with hormones and the horror shows I saw whenever prejudice reared its ugly head. I escaped a lot of the problems by studying. By high school I was back on the honor roll, except if I had one of the teachers who didn't like Natives. I got into the habit of asking older children from the island what the teachers were like and tried to avoid "the bad ones." Bad ones were always trying to put us on the spot, would critically correct our work. We would nearly flunk a test because of a small error and they always managed to try to make us the example in their classrooms. I definitely tried to avoid those teachers.

I couldn't get away from stereotypes, even at summer camp. I attended a camp when I was about thirteen. My mother insisted I go because my younger sister was going and she wanted to make sure she was safe and not alone. I barely saw my sister during the entire two weeks. It was nice because there weren't any remarks made about color so I actually relaxed and had fun. When I attended the archery class, however, the instructor told everyone, "Rhonda doesn't need to be told how to shoot a bow and arrow, she already knows because she's Indian." All the other campers who attended the class were in awe of me because I could shoot a bow and arrow. I had never picked one up. What could I say? Luckily I hit the target; not a bull's-eye, but it was near. I didn't attend another archery class.

When I was in the ninth grade, a friend of mine from Indian Island talked me into going to an all-girls academy, the Academy of St. Joseph's in South Berwick. I really wasn't keen on it, but I knew I was with someone from home so I thought I'd try. I thought it would be nice to get away. We met about forty-five young women who were our age from all over the world. It was so nice to be accepted for who we were as individuals, without any racism. The girls used to ask each other about what it was like where they lived. My friend Adrian and I were asked about being an Indian and what was it like living on an Indian reservation. They asked us first about the teepees. Adrian and I were a little surprised by the fact that they didn't know much about Natives and Native life. When we heard this, we looked at each other as if we knew what we were going to say. We started telling

them about reservation life. We told them we lived in teepees and that we only wore non-Native clothes whenever we left the reservation. We had an elaborate story about our teepees being two-story, with small teepees all around a big one. The smaller ones were the bedrooms, while the big one served the family as a dining and gathering area. We told them all the men in the village hunted together and would shoot buffalo and the women gathered berries and worked in the gardens.

We had them going for days and then felt we had to tell the truth. So we did. All the girls took it in stride; they were disappointed, but I think they were also relieved to hear we lived in houses, just like them! I went back home after two months; it was so hard to live there.

By the time I reached tenth grade, the problem teachers were nearly nonexistent. I don't know why; it wasn't as if the Land Claims had gone away. Perhaps I was able to deal with it better. I would know what they were going to say before they said it and avoided the ones who would try to put me on the spot. I became very quiet and shy. I would choose what class I would participate in depending on the way the teacher approached me. I also started choosing what I would listen to and what I wouldn't. My survival tactics must have helped because I graduated high school, but I was so emotionally exhausted. A lot of the children I grew up with on Indian Island dropped out of school because they couldn't cope. I still wonder how I got through—although thoughts of certain teachers and my favorite guidance counselor, special friends, and the books I loved to read come to mind whenever I wonder, and I smile because they were there to help.

My best friend, Paula, whom I met in the bathroom at Old Town High in my senior year, was a light in the dark tunnel, along with several other girlfriends who were not prejudiced, and some of the guys would talk to me and were my friends. Imagine, being happy because they were there for me? Not happy because of events in school, or the prom, or being involved in some of the clubs, all of which are a part of student life, a life I felt I could not participate in.

I just concentrated on my studies and, in doing so, my grades improved. As I did better, I was accepted a little more; however, even then, if I did as well or better than a non-Indian I was okay, the non-Indian student was still much better, but I was okay. During the times of the Land Claims, I was just glad to be accepted. I also heard that I was an "exceptional

Indian." I guess because I excelled. I never did understand what that meant. Someone else said I was an Indian of a different breed—I guess I was salvageable—I never asked what it meant, perhaps I didn't want to hear the answer. I would go away from these situations feeling weird, thinking, "Yeah, I'm different all right—I just put up with you."

Where I could, outside of school, I would hide the fact I was Native. Luckily we are like chameleons; many of us have light-enough skin to hide in plain view. I was afraid of the reaction. I found that, if someone got to know me first for who I was and then I told them I was Native, they would see me as Rhonda, who happens to be Native. If I didn't wait, chances were good they would see me as an "Indian" whose name happens to be Rhonda.

It wasn't just the Maine Indian Land Claims that contributed to the prejudice. I decided that since I knew children in the Old Town school system before I went to school there and it really helped cushion the blow of prejudice when I attended the schools, I would enter my son on a local hockey team before he left the island school. To me, it would serve two purposes: one, he would get to know local area students, and two, he was such a loving child, I was afraid he wasn't tough enough; I thought hockey would bring out a little more male aggressiveness. Little did I know, I was exposing my son to his first experience with racism.

There were mostly non-Natives on the team. My son said one kid in particular would give war whoops. The coaches didn't correct the kid, nor did they talk about respecting others. My son suffered for two years. He did manage to get back at the kid. My son said they had a scrimmage and he went after the other boy because they were on opposing teams that day. He slammed the boy into the walls and then tripped him. How do you correct the behavior of a child after he's taken so much abuse from another? He knows it wasn't nice and he wasn't a mean child; there aren't too many instances where he would outwardly display such feelings, but being ten years old and abused by this kid with adults watching was more than he could take—I am actually proud of him. He stuck with hockey for two years despite this kid, and for this I am so proud.

My son experienced a stereotype just recently. He is a case manager for a private nonprofit agency in Augusta and works with children at risk from age zero to five. He attended a workshop recently and was told Indian children, both infants and toddlers, head the top of the list of

"at-risk" children. My son has two children who are toddlers and he's the best father any child could ever have; he was quite appalled because such statements indicate that all parents of Indian children are not capable of caring for their children. I'm upset as well; a true slap in the face.

I have found that Indian people are expected to know everything about being Indian. I went on an eight-day fellowship with other journalists. It was an environmental immersion program discussing issues from Maine to Canada. One presenter was from Bangor, Maine. He was talking about all these Native place-names. When he found out I was a member of the Penobscot Tribe, he expected me to know what all those place-names were. When I told him I didn't, he said, "What kind of Indian are you? You're supposed to know what all these names mean!" Wow—talk about being put on the spot and stereotyped. How am I supposed to know all the place-names if I haven't studied them? I didn't respond to him; that was my way of handling it, but perhaps I should have put him in his place. I guess I'm supposed to know everything there is to know about our language and other Wabanaki languages. I've had conversations with others who expected me to know every tribe in existence in the United States—there are over five hundred!

My mother was Passamaquoddy and spoke only Passamaquoddy until age five. My father, who was Penobscot, heard Penobscot spoken as a child but could not speak the language other than a lot of words or phrases. How am I supposed to know Penobscot?

I know some Passamaquoddy but my mother refused to teach us because she had such a rough transition into English. She was five years old and spoke only Passamaquoddy, but when she entered school, she was not allowed to speak her language. Whenever she did, she would be punished. She was forced to learn English, a second language—right on the spot. She was barely out of the toddler stage, still just a baby, but it was as if her Native language was wrong, and bad. The sad part is that most Passamaquoddy children went through this and, as adults, don't want their children to be put through the same cruel immersion program. So many of us have had to learn our language on our own. When I was older, my mother did begin to teach me some of the words, and I always managed to figure out what she was saying when she spoke in her language with her sisters.

An elder told me that what you do today can affect generations to come.

The pain has come down with the generations. In life, I walk two roads, the red and the white. The red, with all the rich culture and the old ways, and the white, with the ever-changing technology and mainstream ways. I lived my first eighteen years on Indian Island. When I moved into the white lands, it was different and it was a transition. One of the first things I noticed was that people in the more mainstream cultures don't have large families. Growing up, I knew who my fifth cousins were and they were family. In the mainstream, a lot of people I spoke to didn't know who their first cousins once removed were, let alone being able to call them family.

Growing up on Indian Island did have its funny moments. By the time I was a teenager, the shows for tourists stopped and the tribe no longer wanted to continue the pageants. Everyone, including myself, felt it was time to dance and celebrate our own culture for ourselves, not for tourists. When tourists came to Indian Island, sometimes they would roll down their windows and ask, "Where are the Indians?" Once I remember my friends and I telling them we were Native, we were right there. The guy responded, "Oh," and then drove away. There was such disappointment in his voice and in his face. I thought, next time I'll handle it differently.

The next time, just the next week, I told some other people who were looking for the Indians, they missed them; they went up river to hunt. They were disappointed and said, "Oh, we missed them." They asked when they would be back; I told them I didn't know. It could be weeks before they return. I couldn't believe they bought it. I heard the same "Oh," but it wasn't the same disappointment. I did this only once, feeling guilty about the lie.