

# **Making the Invisible Visible**

**Poems for Poetry Sunday 2020**

**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Door County**

**Ephraim, Wisconsin**

## **Introduction**

We titled this year's program for Poetry Sunday "Making the Invisible Visible." The invisibility we have been contemplating is that of people who are native to this land—indigenous people, First Nations, "Indians." Our poems reflect on our experience and understanding of Native people, history, traditions and ideas in response to a call from the Fellowship's Racial Justice Action Team. They represent acts of empathy. We hope to encourage a conversation about those who cared for this land centuries before Europeans heard of it and who live here still.

The poets this year include, in order of their appearance here: David Clowers, Estella Lauter, Jack Redell, Ethel Davis, Sharon Auberle, Nancy Rafal, Donna Johnson, Larry Eriksson, Mark Richards, Meg Ziegelmann, Tom Davis and Ralph Murre. I thank them for their creative energy and vision in words.

We come from different places in relation to Native history. Some have extensive and/or intimate experiences with Native people, some not, so there are many points of entry for a conversation to begin. In accord with the First Principle of Unitarian thought, respect for all persons, we hope you will join us on line by sharing your own thoughts and experiences in poetry or prose.

As you read or listen, please keep in mind Chief Simon Khaquados's words quoted by Nancy Rafal: "Do not quarrel or scold one another," and those of the Watchman in Ralph Murre's poem, "do not be without hope."

Estella Lauter, Coordinator

## How the Trees Got Their Leaves

~ David Clowers

In the days before trees had leaves,  
they always felt cold  
and so they would ask birds  
to build nests in their branches  
for black beetles and insects  
to live under their bark  
and for red and gray squirrels  
to fill up their empty places.

When Raven flew into the forest one day  
pine and cedar trees called out to him  
Please build your nest on our limbs  
and the maples and oaks cried out loudly, too,  
No! No! You should build your nest on us!

After Raven had thought for awhile  
about what they had asked for, he pulled  
some small, soft feathers from his breast  
some coverts from under his wings  
and then gave them to every tree  
in the forest to hold onto  
with the tips of their smallest twigs.

Some trees were so afraid  
of feeling cold again that they  
held on too tightly to Raven's black feathers  
he had plucked from his wings  
until they squeezed all of the green  
orange, yellow and finally the red  
colors out from them.

The feathers he had taken from his wings  
flew away from these fearful trees each fall  
but the feathers he had taken  
from places that were closest  
to his heart stayed green  
on the cedar trees, the pines and ponderosa  
for all the year long.

And this is how the trees got their leaves.

## **Making Peace**

~ Estella Lauter

Until an Oneida student told me,  
I'd never heard the story of how  
centuries before the Conquest  
the Haudenosaunee Peacemaker  
came through his own sorrow  
to mediate pain and anger

replacing one man's mean reflection  
with his own serene countenance  
by looking down the chimney  
into a pot of soup on a stove

or counting another's grievances  
one by one, however many,  
on strings of perfect shells  
until they could be borne.

Face to face, he met the ones  
who undermined their purpose  
with fear and hatred.

Face to face, he taught the people  
to meet in the Longhouse  
until they reached consensus  
for the Confederacy of nations.

And in his wisdom he advised  
that Clan Mothers should choose  
and depose the Chiefs.  
He knew that women  
are the first and last  
resort for Peace.

## **Goyathlay**

~ Jack Redell

I was a symbol of resistance  
And warrior spirit  
A fearless fighter  
While seeking vengeance  
On Mexican troops  
Who murdered my wife  
Children and mother

Then US miners  
Settlers and soldiers invaded  
My Chiricahua Apache land  
I rejected and resisted efforts  
To place my people on reservations  
Denounced as murderers  
By angry whites

Hunted by soldiers I surrendered  
When I was 57 years years old  
A prisoner of war  
At Fort Sill, Oklahoma  
I died in 1909 never to return  
To my homeland in Arizona  
I am Geronimo

## Hands, the Shoshone

~ Ethel Davis  
To Patricia Fennell\*

I put my hands  
over the places  
where your fingers  
wore the stone smooth.  
I found your hands!  
I feel them  
on the scraper  
found along  
the migration trail.

A scraper made  
from a finer basalt--  
not found here,  
so it had to be carried  
from another place.  
Just as the obsidian  
cutting tool,  
black shiny stone,  
had to be carried  
from a distant place:  
sharp,  
made for cutting  
sinew and flesh—  
perhaps the salmon  
that ran up  
the fast moving stream  
during migration,  
or the deer.

Your heartbeat  
is still along this river—  
I hear it!  
You worked swiftly,  
glad to fill the bellies  
of your children

until  
black gunpowder  
took your hands.  
The fingers fell to the ground.

## Only the Wind

~ Sharon Auberle  
for Sarah Unknown

the daughter who looks like me  
does not understand

how there was a name given to me  
the night I was born  
under Anuyi the Windy Moon  
how it is the name  
engraved on my bones  
the name I do not forget  
even now as so much fades  
Sarah said my husband yes  
from this day forth Sarah you shall be  
my husband who did not have to  
give up his name yet gladly  
then I gave myself to him  
though always he was a stranger  
to my people -

this tall man who loved me  
who gave me four red-haired sons  
and the daughter who cares for me  
now that my seasons are many  
and he long buried up on the hill  
where Grandmother and I made prayers  
to Selu and gathered sweet berries

this daughter who looks like me  
reads her bible by firelight  
her hair shining black as the death snake  
and she tells me the story of Abraham's Sarah  
how comely was she  
how great her number of years and this  
says my daughter is why I was given her name  
though never did I wear it true

but one day soon the singing grass will cover me  
and Sarah will be carved on the stone above me

the daughter who looks like me  
can never understand -

who I was before Sarah  
and that only the wind  
will remember my name.

## Ephraim Memorial Pole

~ Nancy Rafal

A Norwegian hatched the idea  
after founding a society to  
honor the history of this place  
He sought to recognize that natives  
had lost much  
to the white notion of civilization

From tall pine felled by lightning  
A pole was carved and painted  
Six bands depicted the story of  
native and white interaction  
told from his Scandinavian perspective

The only similarity to totem  
Owasse, the bear cub crowning the pole  
Owasse, personal totem of the 19th century  
Chief of the Menomonee  
Owasse, the indomitable strength that lived on  
in the person of Roy Oshkosh  
But true totem poles developed in the Pacific Northwest  
not among the Great Lakes tribes

So celebrate the Memorial Pole  
Idea of a Norwegian  
Erected on a public golf course  
Designed by another Norwegian  
Carved by a Belgian

At the 1927 Dedication, Chief Simon Khaquados  
is reported to have remarked,  
“Those who do not listen, will die,  
Do not quarrel or scold one another  
We must not hate each other; we  
must love all the world.”

Now, almost a century later,  
His message rings just as true  
and on just as many dead ears.

## Split Feather

~ Donna Johnson

for Mary Lou

October 23, 1925–March 23, 1927

For fifty years  
the photo had a special place  
on Nana's dresser, close to her.  
A black and white photo circa 1926  
of a dark-haired, cherub-cheeked child  
in a winter hat and coat, both edged in fur,  
to ward off the harsh Chicago winters.

For thirty-four years  
it has lived in another special place,  
on a table in my living room,  
surrounded by relatives, but not ancestors.  
I did not ask questions about the child,  
when answers could have been given.  
Only after Nana's death did I learn  
of Mary Lou, an American Indian baby  
adopted by my grandparents and  
felled by influenza at age 17 months.

How did this Lost Bird  
come to nest with a family in Chicago?  
Was it by necessity or force?  
Divine providence or misguided intervention?  
Was her tribe Anishinaabe or Illini?  
And what was her clan?  
What was her birth name?  
What was her spirit guide?  
What would this Original Person have become?

Now these questions gnaw like a dog on a bone.

\*Lost Birds or Split Feathers are terms used for American Indians who were placed in Non-Indian families as children

## A Crossroads in Time

~ Larry Eriksson

Six miles south of Hayward  
is a long, narrow bay –  
part of Lake Windigo  
with its Ojibwe name,  
where my grandparents built  
a cozy log cabin  
and a resort with small  
housekeeping cottages.

In the nineteen-thirties,  
they saw Native Peoples  
traversing the portage  
connecting Windigo  
to the Namekagon,  
St Croix, and Brule Rivers –  
joining Superior  
and the Mississippi.

For years, a key crossing,  
but now time is money,  
cars and trucks speed over  
the portage without pause –  
moving too fast to hear  
the echoes of natives,  
traders, and voyageurs  
on the ancient pathway.

Rolling down the highway,  
no time to take a break  
or think about the past  
as they pollute the air  
and induce climate change –  
emission free travel  
just a dim memory  
from a slower era.

## Indigenous Relations

~ Mark Richards

### Order of the Arrow

White kids playing at Indian  
    rather at a caricature of Indian.  
Dressed in Mom-sewn leggings and wigs  
    ordered from catalogs full of beads and feathers  
We painted our faces rather randomly  
    until word came not to  
        seems it's a religious thing  
We danced before other white kids  
    a performance  
        not a ritual

### Then came the Ordeal

    sleeping alone under the stars  
        a day spent in silent service  
            a nighttime bonfire before painted rocks  
We played at being Indian to model  
    honor  
        integrity  
            community  
Because we could not find it in ourselves.

### Wounded Knee

Between the Black Hills and the Sand Hills  
    among homes with aging cars  
        and open wounds  
A Native American village of two buildings  
    a parking lot  
        and a sign  
At my car I am offered a dream catcher  
    simple bent twig with fish line netting  
On the roadway I am offered another  
    metal hoop with fish line and beads  
At the cemetery I am offered one more  
    wrapped in deerskin with beaded laces and a horsehair tassel  
Still not enough to capture the nightmares of this place

The young lady walks me through the cemetery,  
shows me the grave of Lost Bird  
taken by a soldier  
kept and used  
sickened and died to return home.

The young man asks me to donate to  
the annual horseback charge to remember  
surrender  
resistance  
survival.

Sweat Lodge

Son of a chief living indigenous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

You teach your language to movie stars  
only after you teach your culture

You speak without time  
beginning when all are gathered  
ending when all are completed

Speaking with horses your manner is respectful  
you are not master  
you listen to their intention  
and invite them to play

Knowing how to relate to horses, you said,  
will teach us how to relate to each other.

I asked you to teach me your prayer  
You say your prayer is living in gratitude  
not in a special moment each day  
but in how you move through creation

You are grateful for  
living of this planet  
speaking your tongue  
being your culture

We build the sweat lodge of green poles and heavy blankets  
and a passage at either end

It is dark and close and hot rocks cast us into a place of  
challenge

question

community

An ordeal of spirit in the body

Each session ends with the flaps thrown open to the cool evening air

First session you pray

Second session we pray, although I could not

Third session, the prayer comes from above the heat and my  
back aches

In the Morning

You challenge Christianity as a fraudulent tool of oppression  
formed by your experience of violence by its hand.

I defend Christianity as a message of love

warped by an insatiable quest for power.

Experience forms understanding.

You stoke my discomfort, fire questions at my culture, cue my doubts:

Is Christianity actually evil?

Can you throw your voice in the dark?

Do you only want cash from me?

Does my culture have no model for virtue?

I feel a new dawn rising, and I am still facing west.

**We Saw You  
Heard You**

~ Meg Ziegelmann

.....a Nana and 3 granddaughters step inside First Nation life

They're our Spirits

watching, protecting us  
he says  
of the majestic eagles  
always there  
on the shores of Olympic Peninsula

*I love him, I love him!  
I don't care he's only 10*

she 13  
arms wrapped around him  
he in his starry sunglasses

she hears the soulful prayer songs  
of a young alcoholic  
struggling to stay sober

sees the mother elders  
circling, wrapping the pained teen  
in their love

suspicious of poverty  
catapulted from a middle class bubble  
dropped in to the unknown  
she turns servant  
silently, tirelessly, steadily, prepares  
for the Quileute death ceremony of the Chiefs' sister

later sits motionless, watching  
the parting of male teens  
on their arduous canoe journey  
to manhood

She's a special child

the Hopi Shaman says  
as he watches her  
wearing a new name, Mud Girl  
cloaked in wet clay  
building traditional bread ovens on Masa's edge

watches  
as she runs with young child on her back  
again and again and again  
never without a smile on her young face

no matter she sleeps on the floor  
shares all thing  
she too feels our unease  
spills the same tears  
when dancing in front of us  
a young boy gives us thanks

Shaman speaks to her alone  
in hushed tones  
sending her back to her life

She listens

as the Black Feet elders tell their stories  
of the many losses  
dignity stripped  
identity relinquished  
denied their living spirits  
their lands shrinking  
defiled by pipe lines, coal mines  
words of protest lost in the wind  
not an apology  
yet resolute in waiting  
waiting

And me

I am in worlds I know naught  
where eyes see through a different lens  
ears hear unfiltered sounds  
dreams bring messengers  
spirits live in all things  
all things sacred  
drums beat to heart  
life is circular  
and I am.... still  
in reverent silence

## **Meditation on the Song**

~ Tom Davis

Last night at Bay Mills Community College  
Wade Wiartalla and Rachel Kay were talking.  
Their talking was a song.

My life, their lives are songs.

The Indian song is deep,  
a river flowing from thousands of years of voices.

Outside the Reservation two people are talking tonight.  
They, too, are singing.  
The American song, too, is deep,  
a river flowing from around earth through time.

Sometimes the Reservation song is an American song;  
sometimes voices from the Reservation  
and surrounding communities  
rise in harmony.

The beaver, dark brown, big, flat tailed,  
living west of the Bay Mills campus,  
is a song.  
The black bear in its den  
as white snow piles high in woods  
and the Lake Superior shore near the den,  
bordered now by ice covered with dark snow,  
and blue jays winging into the college's bird feeders  
are songs.

The earth's song,  
filled with flight of birds,  
swimming fish,  
movement of waters,  
breathing of soil,  
leaf-talking oak trees,  
and murmuring men and women,  
rises into gravities of space and time.

Where the moon sings,  
and rings of Saturn shine their song,  
and frozen seas of Io  
move cold beneath a planet of ice,  
Sol blazes a star's song.

The solar system's song  
rises into the Milky Way's light bands,  
which sing into distance of galaxies  
that wheel great, sun-rich songs  
back to beginning  
and toward the end  
as they dance to music  
of universe expanding in time and space.

At the day care center down the road  
I saw a grave-faced Indian boy  
and a red-haired, brown-eyed girl  
swinging on a swing  
yesterday morning.

## Starlings in America

~ Ralph Murre

The watchman stood alone on his blue hill  
and watched, then, as he does now.  
Saw them coming.

A few Vikings, some kook in a coracle.  
He saw three ships come sailing in  
from Spain.

They traded trinkets for coconuts and corn,  
traded pox for potatoes.  
A syphilitic wife will change your life.

The sun rises and the sun sets.  
Their God was nailed to a tree  
where they could keep an eye on him.

They brought original sin, brought a savior  
and took silver, brought guns and took gold.  
Brought alcohol, took tobacco.

They brought ponies and plunder,  
were crazy for beaver  
and a quick way to China.

In time, they brought steel and steam.  
A steel knife will change your life, too.  
The sun rises and the sun sets.

They brought bulldozers and drag-line buckets.  
Tore the Earth. Tore the Good Earth.  
Put it on Mr. Peabody's coal train.

Brought languages,  
took languages away.  
Brought starlings.

Brought Studebakers and Scotch Tape.  
Duct tape and red tape.  
They brought refrigerator magnets,

scotch and soda, the cotton gin, wrinkle –  
free polyester. Bourbon and Bud Lite and  
a bomb that bloomed in the desert.

They taught children to hide under desks.  
Atomic strife will change your life.  
The sun rises and sets.

Edsels come and Edsels go.  
The watchman stands alone on his blue hill.  
Do not be hopeful,

he calls out at last,  
but do not be without hope.  
They brought Schubert.