



Photo courtesy of Stephanie Snow

Stephanie Snow is a writer and musician who currently lives on the Meskwaki Settlement outside of Tama, Iowa, with her family. She is part of an ensemble that has been nominated for several categories in the Native American Music Awards. The extended biographical statement following the poems lends important context to her two poems.

Poetry of Cultural and Spiritual Identity

STEPHANIE SNOW

Next To Me

I made a space for you next to me
Cleared by a shaft of light
Reclining against our Tree Twins
Whose limbs touch
And grow to reach each other
Green leaves flash messages
The past streams into the current moment
Soft smooth belly
Forearms with light, fine hair
Fingers long and elegant like those of the ancestors
Do you see? My wounds have become exotic tattoos

Home

Gooseberries pierced palms
Deciduous trees walk westward
so slowly
feathery roots trailing
Fingering the ground
Grasping at dust

Shadow people operated
in muddy floods of chemicals
and cut my ovary in an act of genocide

Sips of roseroot tea
Medinebisona for my throat
Isolation for the vomiting
Nosika for the whole of me

A pressure on my shoulders and back of my neck
From the eyes of surrounding woods
alone.
Never alone?

Scraping thud
 As mother pushed me to the ground
 Ready to do away with me for the third time
 or was it the seventh?
 A white cloud reached down a billowy arm
 to brush away gravel embedded in hands and knees

Nokomis was my playground
 warm, sparkle-eyed jungle gym
 Brown supermodel/role model with wrinkled skin
 turned ancestor-goddess
 who visited my deathbed
 And will greet me on the other side

My documented federal name is Stephanie Snow. My traditional clan name is Aditea (pronounced Ahh-shee-deh) of the Swan Clan of the Meskwaki People who reside on the only Native American Settlement in this country. A “settlement” is different from a reservation in that the Meskwaki People bought the land they live on, and own it in common. My background is multi-tribal, multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual. I am an enrolled tribal member of the HoChunk Nation. I am a Meskwaki descendant and was raised with the language and customs of the Meskwaki People. I am also Lakota (commonly known as the Sioux). My great-grandfather was HoChunk, Omaha and Black (when the term “African American” didn’t exist, but the powerful interaction of cultural and spiritual identities grew between the two groups). My father’s grandmother was Dutch. French heritage exists on both sides of my family. I speak Meskwaki, Spanish, English and French—my first language being Meskwaki.

As an embodiment of diversity in human, walking, talking form, I have been aware of differences and similarities from an early age as I was practically ostracized from most communities for the way I look.

I grew up surrounded by the woods. Oak trees and cottonwoods were my playmates and companions near the Iowa River. We gathered and grew our own food. Our People’s ceremonies are synchronized with the cycles of the

seasons and the position of the sun. Although not claimed by my parents, not fully accepted into any community, (Native or otherwise) I belong to Iowa, the perfect place where the woodlands transition to prairie. It is the land from which my body was made and will return to, and to which my heart is intimately connected.

After graduation from Grinnell College in 2003 with a degree in Anthropology, I worked in the areas of career development, academic advising, diversity, tribal cultural resources and language preservation, and resource coordination, and I have provided interpretation services as well. In one position I was able to assist individuals from over 100 countries.

I have been a member of a multicultural dance troupe out of Des Moines and a major Native American Dance troupe out of Minneapolis for several years. As a member of a local Native American song, storytelling and dance troupe, I have also had the opportunity to work with acclaimed Native American artists, performers and actors. The acoustic duo in which I am a vocalist has been nominated for several Native American Music Awards in both 2004 and 2015, the highest honor a Native American performer can receive.

I sing. I dance. I educate. Not only am I a role model not only for my two children; I have also been someone others have sought for advice, consultation, opinion, and perspective due to my personal identity as a formally educated Native woman with traditional cultural values. 