

Talking Stick

Volume 11.1 Jan / Feb / Mar 2008

NATIVE ARTS QUARTERLY

Empowering Native Artists - Visual Performing Literary Media



INSIDE THIS ISSUE >

Letter from the Editor by Steve Elm

An Indian Boy by Myrton Running Wolf

First Taste by Ramona Medicine Crow

Scientists Advocate for Native Cliché Alternatives by Tristan Ahtone

Talking Stick

Volume 11, Issue 1

TALKING STICK STAFF

Editorial Director: **Diane Fraher** (Osage/Cherokee) / Editor: **Steve Elm** (Oneida)
Assistant Editor/Layout: **Jacque Beau Fontenelle** (Hunkpapa Lakota)

AMERINDA STAFF


Director: **Diane Fraher** (Osage/Cherokee) / Administrative Coordinator: **Jacque Beau Fontenelle** (Hunkpapa Lakota)
Special thanks to the American Friends Service Committee

Editorial Policy: AMERINDA welcomes editorial submission. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of AMERINDA.

Printed in USA. *Magic Circle Printing*. Talking Stick Native Arts Quarterly has been published continuously since 1997.

For more information please visit www.amerinda.com or for general inquiries amerinda@amerinda.org

Cover art Grandpa Joe 2003 by Ramona Medicine Crow



Letter From The Editor

By now many of you know that our second anthology of Native writing, *Sovereign Bones*, edited by Eric Gansworth, has been published to terrific reviews. Like our first anthology, *Genocide of the Mind*, edited by Marijo Moore, this book was published by Amerinda, Inc, in partnership with Nation Books. We are extremely grateful to Nation Books for their continued support of Amerinda, as well as of Native writers.

The community joined Amerinda in honoring Eric, along with Lisa Mayo of Spiderwomen Theater and board member emeritus of Amerinda, at the National Arts Club on Friday, November 16. Guests gave testimonials to the wonderful service the honorees have provided the greater Native community as esteemed artists, as well as ambassadors to the larger world of arts and letters. The evening culminated in a reading of excerpts from *Sovereign Bones*, featuring contributors Mr. Gansworth, Kristy Gansworth, Diane Fraher, Scott Lyon Richards, Steve Thornton, and me. Special thanks go to actors Murielle Borst, Nancy McDoniel, Vickie Ramirez, Myrton Running Wolf, Kim Snyder, and Danielle Soames for contributing their talents to the readings.

This issue of *Talking Stick* is going to print as the Public Theater's The Native Theater Festival is scheduled to happen. We will report on this exciting event in our next issue; however, we may have some reportage on line in the near future. Check our website, www.amerinda.org for updates.

On another exciting note, Amerinda will produce two evenings of staged readings of Native playwrights at the Public Theatre, one in May and the other in September. Our first reading will be of Vicki Ramirez's play, *Smoke*. Special thanks to Mandy Hackett, Associate Artistic Director, and Liz Frankel, Literary Associate, at the Public for their generous offer of rehearsal space and a stage. We especially thank the Public Theater's Artistic Director Oskar Eustis for envisioning, along with us, a sustained and fruitful presence of Native artists in the theatre world.

Steve Elm
Editor
Talking Stick
steveelm@amerinda.org

An Indian Boy



Mryton Running Wolf

An Indian boy, watching his mother cook frybread, dipped his fingers in the flour, rubbed it on his cheeks and yelled, "Look, Mom! I'm White!"

His mother slapped him across the face and said, "Go tell your father what you just said!"

In tears the boy went into the living room. His father asked, "What's the matter, boy?" When the boy told him, his father punched him in the chest yelling, "Get your ass in the back bedroom right now and tell your Grandmother what you just said!"

The Indian boy went to his Grandma in the back bedroom and told her the story. She slapped him so hard she knocked him off his feet. Looking down at him she asked, "What the hell are you thinking?"

The boy answered, "Grandma ... I-I'm th-thinking, I've only been White for two minutes ... and I already hate you fuckin' Indians!" - Author unknown

Oh, my people, my people ... wait, scratch that ... who are "my people"? Why, oh, why do we continue to create and tolerate the most over-romanticized versions of Native American struggle? The pathetic practice of stereotype kills any hope of finding an authentic voice and, yes, we are complicit. But I guess if it pays well enough we're down for anything.

Indians are not funny ... well ... they're not allowed to be funny.

16.3% of all Native Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, contrasted against just 7.0% for the general American population. However, 95% of diabetic Native Americans suffer from Type II diabetes; attributed to behavioral factors such as sedentary lifestyle and obesity. Our lack of exercise, lack of motivation, depression, violence, illegal drug use, and alcoholism are an embarrassment to the United States of America, but these are also problems easily ignored by the average U.S. citizen. Laughing at these conditions is not only inappropriate, but it also serves as a constant reminder that nothing is changing on the Reservations because nothing is being done. Laughter, inappropriate or otherwise, is a form of resistance and defiance, a strong coping mechanism and a necessary choice for survival. Native America's intricate humor is as sharp as a sword. And hilarious stories of perseverance, crafted over years and years of trial and error in the hands of masters like my grandmother, my mother, my aunts, and my sister, have become acts of empowerment.

This peace and hilarity are fragile however, and go away instantly when a stranger enters the room, especially a non-Native stranger. The amazing ability to become immediately silent was courageously displayed decades ago as a protective adaptation by boarding school students who were conditioned into believing that telling and enjoying their own humor, their own stories, in their own language was inappropriate and crude. I can't help but think that the same brilliant survival strategy was also used in the days of King Phillip, Tecumseh, Chief Joseph, and Cochise. Laughter has always had power, and it is time to stop minimizing this truth in favor of social acceptance. Native American pain is not historical; it is present today, experienced daily in our own backyards. We all, Native and non-Native, share the burden of what is hap-

pening to the American Indian, but nobody wants to shoulder the blame. The ever-present pain on the Reservation causes America to look at itself, and the guilt is too much. Paying attention to the now, and not the historical, means that the choice of continuing to do nothing is a choice that America makes every day. It is this stubborn guilt that won't go away ... and I guess it is just better to ignore the problem.

Walking down the roads of most Indian Reservations one often hears fighting, sometimes love making, but always laughter ... or maybe that's just me. Native American humor is born of pain and that pain is expressed humorously in vital re-contextualizing voices behind closed doors, away from those who do not understand, nor want to understand.

"Theater not only provides a place to express Native American tradition, but its real strength lies in its ability to explore deeper aspects of Native American culture and identity which are inherently inconsistent and ambiguous. Room must be made for this exploration." - Unidentified author

For years, television and film producers have asked about the elusive "Reservation Humor" they've heard so much about. Sadly, I don't think they'll ever find it, or I should say make room for it. I recently saw a wonderful Canadian award show produced by Native Americans on television. It was beautifully crafted and technically superior. Ever hear of it? Yeah, well, not many of us Lower 48 Americans have. I even tried to Google it, but I couldn't track it down ... scary, huh?

Hollywood producers, social scientists, and Native American scholars have not allowed Native Americans to be funny. I'm not talking about the rare appearance of a Native actor on an episode of *King of the Hill* and I'm not talking about the feeble attempts at humor many college professors and political activists try to inject into their diatribes about cultural oppression. I'm talking about fall out of your chair, burp and fart at the

same time, laugh 'til your cheeks hurt, back slapping, real comedy, wit, and satire born out of familiarity and bravado used brilliantly by such artists as stand-up comedian Don Burnstick (Cree), humorist/singer Vincent Craig (Navajo), and author Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) who've for years honed and wielded their craft with seemingly effortless mastery. Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe) had this mastery at the top of her game when she was still in the game. HBO Films, PBS, NAPT, Mel Gibson, Steven Spielberg, Tony Hillerman, anthropologists, and Native American scholars have failed a thousand times to capture this humor.

Stage, film, and television companies throughout our country support African-American, Asian-American, and Latino artists through diversity programming, but frequently forget to include the Native-Americans. They default by claiming an affiliation with a singular artist or organization, but they often leave these Native people out in the margins. After returning from a recent film festival, a friend of mine asked, "Hey, Myrt, I thought this festival supported Native American filmmakers? I didn't see any Indians there." It turns out the Native American programming for that particular film festival wasn't on Main Street. Nor was it on the next street over. To see a film by an independent Native American writer/director/producer at this particular festival, one had to go two streets over onto a darkly lit road where there was little advertising and absolutely no promotion ... breathe deep ... aw, progress!

The bourgeois gatekeepers know well that, although it is important to support Native Americans, one should never give them Main Stage privilege unless the color is right ... and that color is green. Native American activism and scholarly pursuit doesn't lead to big paydays. Guilt and suffering are not big money makers, they do not pay the light bills ... never have, never will ... and this is the brilliant quagmire we've landed in. We can no longer ignorantly proclaim rationale such as, "Any exposure is good exposure!" or the ever popular "Yo, at least I'm getting paid!" Nor can we participate and encourage independ-

ent film festivals, public television, or reputable theater organizations to marginalize Native America by their programming practices, compartmentalizing and embracing tasteful gross-over-generalizations and embarrassing fetish. Fetish often fed to them by academic scholars, some of whom are Native.

"The real tragedy of abject poverty, terrible health care, and life being basically a roll of the dice is that it breaks the connection between effort and reward; life becomes arbitrary and brutal ... You take any nation, you will find that intelligence and ability and aspiration are all equally distributed across the society; but organization, opportunity, and investment are not ... Our differences do matter, but our common humanity matters more." - President Bill Clinton

Against these huge obstacles, hard working Native American youth are mustering the courage and resources to attend institutions like NYU, Circle in the Square, USC, Juilliard, UCLA, and the Alvin Ailey Dance School, but continued elitism from academia, theater, film, and funding organizations undermines their efforts and their sacrifices with statements like, "We are only looking to support published Native American authors." These institutions communicate to the world that American Indians don't matter. The few Native artists and scholars who do benefit, however, are obligated to be complacent as their very presence allows these organizations to thrive and continue their harmful gestures. Aboriginal Canadian television is booming, Native American hip-hop artists are finding important political expression, and American Indian skateboarders are displaying virtuosic mastery of the Japanese-Anime visual art form, but our bourgeois powers-that-be dismiss and ignore these individuals for "not being Indian enough." Our American Higher Education system is struggling to recruit Native American students and I would argue, generally speaking, that Native America is rightfully suspicious of higher education. Maybe it has something to do with the revisionist colonial take American education has displayed toward indigenous people for centuries and still faintly echoes today? However,

given American Higher Education's prerequisite standing with an already biased American theater, publishing, and film industry, it doesn't look like we'll be seeing any new Native American productions any time soon. Worse still, some of the Native artists receiving organizational support assume a voice of authority for all Native America while pushing aside the hip-hop and skateboard artists, poets and comedians, much to the relief of a guilt laden American social system.

Native America needs solidarity, organization, and leadership. We need to further develop our skills as writers, comedians, actors, and artists. We can no longer hold to the outdated belief that all we need to do is write a tale of suffering (the more embellished the better) and we will garnish support from funding organizations. This undisciplined approach will never lead to a visible presence on Broadway, Off-Broadway, network television, or at the local Cineplex. My real confusion and deepest sorrow is for those Native artists who feel they are obligated to return the favor for acceptance; Indians who indulge in their own stereotype by using phrases like "Our People", "Indian Tradition", and the always popular "Dominant Society". We all know Native America cannot be lumped into a single group. The Blackfeet disagree with the Cree, who disagree with the Lakota, who are nothing like the Seminole, who are worlds apart from the Tlingit, who look completely different than the Apache. But all too frequently we agree to be dumped in a common pile for a stage play, a television program, a Hollywood motion picture, or an independent documentary.

Comedians, poets, hip-hop artists, recent college graduates, and skateboarders display the skill and the community insight lacking in professors, anthropologists, archeologists, cultural theorists, and historians. Honestly, when was the last time you heard a historian tell a good joke? Compare that to the last time you roared with laughter at a tribal high-school basketball game, sitting around a B-B-Q with friends and family, hanging out at a skateboard park, on the bleachers of a pow-pow, a hip-hop battle, or the

dinner table.

“... a dreamer (has) a vision of the very best life has to offer and a determination to see all men have their rightful share of this offering; not as a reward, but because justice will tolerate nothing less.” Dick Gregory – comedian, activist, writer

Film productions like *Pathfinder*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *Into the West*, and Broadway productions like *Lewis and Clark* and *Tom Sawyer* have simply recycled the Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows and D.W. Griffith’s savage Indian films from a hundred years ago. Nothing has progressed from singular acts of acquiescence. It is ridiculous to hold patiently to the belief that if we only bide our time portraying the very worst stereotypes and playing minor roles in major productions we will one day arrive at the promised land of inclusion. Being an actor and/or artist requires more than long hair, high cheekbones, and a ribbon shirt; the miniscule impact of even our most visible actors, directors, and producers point to this fact.

Fetishizing Native American struggle continues to be our biggest challenge. It alienates non-Native audiences, fails to invite opposing viewpoints, creates guilt and fatigue, and inaccurately depicts the reality of our lives. The hard work required to engage a diverse audience and invite those not familiar with our issues is killed by our inability to create laughter, satire, and enjoyment. Only when we stop homogenizing our own stories and start listening to our own voices, only when we celebrate the role of laughter coming from the Reservation and support the artistry flourishing there, only when we access unique and genuine human interaction will we find the truly universal, the truly human, and the truly transcendent. □

"Myrton studied Performing Arts at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, performed with the Juilliard School, received his Masters degree in film from the University of Southern California, and is currently a graduate student in Performance Studies at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. And, yes, he agrees he's had way too much education. For more info. www.myspace.com/sacinaw"

First Taste

The cold Wyoming wind whips and shakes the blue nylon tent in the crisp July evening. This is summer nights in these parts. I wonder if the aluminum poles will hold it together as I play with my *Star Trek* action figures. The tent sways a bit from the pressure. The distant cries and singing of voices swell up and down like a tumultuous sea being blown by strong winds. The instruments and heavy beat of the drums in tempo with the Jesus crowd. Fingers play expertly, working the crowd. My ears listen for my parent’s footsteps through the long, olive, green sweet grass from the evangelical tent. I am supposed to be sick. That’s what I told my mom. I did really feel sick earlier. But not from anything they think. I pull out my markers and *Charlie’s Angels* notebook from my green backpack.

My head pokes out from the tent to sneak a peek for signs of parents. Content and relief floods my chest as I continue to draw my rock star’s afro in my notebook. I remember the image of the singers on the show *Solid Gold* the other night. I put on some flaring cuffs, collars and most importantly monster platform shoes. I color in the vibrant colors of red, purple, green, blues and yellows. I put black sunglasses on the lead singer. All the while I imagine myself as the lead singer. He looks real tough and cool. New words I learned on TV. I imagine tons of people, girls with lots of makeup, are screaming at him. I practice and dance around like Elvis. I like his moves. I liked him best when he was young with his hair all slicked back. He’s tough too, sort of like the Fonz from *Happy Days*.

I shake my legs and shoulders just like Elvis. I pretend I am wearing the leather jacket and blue jeans with the black boots. My dad and aunties like him a lot and are faithful fans of all his movies and concerts on TV reruns. In my mind’s eye I carry an image of my aunt Maggie, who actually went to Las Vegas to see him perform, being kissed on the cheek by Elvis himself! She’s so lucky, I thought. How I wish I was there to hug and kiss him too. Cruise around with



Ramona Medicine Crow

him in his Cadillacs.

I pick up Hawkeye, one of my many male action figures, from *M.A.S.H.*, the TV show. He looks like him too. He is my favorite for now. I move his limbs around trying to make him dance. I’m going to draw him. My collection of men characters is growing. I never let my brothers or sister play with them except for Marcus, my younger brother, but only occasionally. They are my precious toys. I can make them do anything in the world. And no one to bother them, fight them or laugh at them.

I turn my notebook around to look at Farah Fawcett again. I have a crush on her. But I don’t dwell on this very long. I stare at her boobs. They’re so big. My cheeks get flushed. I sit back and listen for footsteps.

I pull on my hooded, blue sweatshirt from Yellowstone Park; which has brown bears on it and then pull on my white captain hat. I love my hat. It always feels colder up here near the mountains on this part of our rez. My family and I live in a lower valley area where the summer nights aren’t quite as cold. We are camped out on our relative’s large field along with other relatives and other skins from tribes around

the state. They are having a Fourth of July Christian camp-meeting. I pull down on my hat tightly as my eyes squint in concentration.

Butterflies patter in my stomach as I remember again how this girl I secretly like is supposed to be arriving tomorrow. Her name is Leah and she is a year younger than me. We both act funny around each other. We are both old enough to recognize the feeling of butterflies whenever we see each other. But when I'm around our parents and the other Jesus crowd I only feel bad. Somehow, instinctively, I know not to let on how I really feel about her around them. I show my feelings a little only around my younger brother Marcus, who also has a crush on her. It's ok for him because he's a boy. Even though we both like the same girl we never talk about it. He never questions me. He just accepts it. I let him play with my action figures to keep him happy every now and then.

I end up playing outside the tent most of the time when I go to church with my parents. I can't sit down for long. My mom says I have ants in my pants. I always feel bad and bored; the way the preacher shouts all this stuff about hell, the devil, and that lake of fire. My heart aches with fear and discomfort whenever everyone yells and cries. I can't wait to run outside. When I race my boy cousin, I always win. We play a game called Not-it. We chase those lakes of fire away with our legs and laughter. Just recently I stopped coming to these local camp-meetings and church nights. I usually beg to stay at my aunt Lili's. She lives in our town and she is my favorite auntie. She's not into church. My folks let me stay with her usually, since auntie watched me when I was a baby. I would have stayed with her this weekend were it not for Leah.

When I think of Leah I smile at her image, her big beautiful almond brown eyes the way they light up when she looks my way and how she can't stop staring at me and then gets all shy. The best thought is how her pink full lips

smile a secret, which only we know. I grabbed her waist and hugged her tight once when we played together last year out of sheer joy. She smiled in this way I never noticed before; it made my heart beat harder. She grabbed my hands and pulled me towards this wooded part of the park away from the crowd and other kids, where the camp-meeting was held at that time. She held my hand as we walked a bit and she got quiet. I didn't know what joke to tell as I began to get nervous. I didn't know what to expect. Just her holding my hand was enough for me. She suddenly pulls me over to this great big tree and pulls me towards her as her slender arms encircle my neck. She holds me tight. I pull her tiny waist towards mine and we hug for a long time. My face flushes with heat and excitement. She stares at me with those brown eyes of hers. I feel like I am falling as I sigh, staring back at her. As her black curls fall over her eyes she tells me she likes me too much. I stare and grin ear to ear as I say, "Me too." She wishes we lived closer to each other.

"I always feel bad and bored; the way the preacher shouts all this stuff about hell, the devil, and that lake of fire."

She looks so sad, I hug her again hard. We sit down and try not to feel too sad. Soon after, we start to wrestle and try to play, with our hearts full of joy and sadness. We both know she would be leaving soon. We heard some kids coming near and Leah looked at me and kissed me hard before they saw us. She turned and dashed off. I ran after her. Not soon after that they left. That was a year ago.

I shove all my stuff into my green backpack. I hear footsteps crunch and swish through the sweet smelling grass. I hear my mom's murmuring and my brother Marcus and baby sister Mary giggling. I lay down under my blanket pretending to sleep. The tent's zipper whizzes open, revealing mom and kids in tow. Mary looks sleepy as she rubs her eyes with her brown, chubby fists. She looks like a living doll in her frilly yellow dress. Momma finally has a girl who she can dress up without having to fight tooth and nail. I hate dresses. Marcus jumps

on the bed I'm on. He giggles. My mom shushes him up. She says,

"Heyyy, shush now, your sister's sick, don't jump on that bed."

Marcus says, "Awww, she's not sleeping! I saw her eyes open up Momma!"

He laughs as he jumps on the other bed. I say indignantly, "But I am sick! You big baby!"

I sit up. I make like I'm still feeling bad, as I rub my eyes and wrinkle my nose. I give Marcus the mean-eye. He laughs and jumps around, kicking up his cowboy boots, just like Daddy's. Mom opens up her big leather western purse. I like this one because it looks like a miniature saddle. She lifts out burgers, chips and sodas from the stand. She looks at me and smiles; her face lights up. She says, "Uh hmmm... thought you'd like that!"

She rubs my forehead with her warm strong hands. Her familiar scent mixed with her Avon lotion permeates my nostrils. I tell her I am feeling a little better since I rested. I take a big bite out of my burger. I smile up at her. We all sit and eat, munching on our spread. Marcus keeps us laughing with his monkey faces and noises and jumping around. He bends over and pretends to fart real loud. We all laugh. I love my mom's belly laugh.

I wish this never ends. I like this part of the camp-meetings, the camping part. It ends as soon as my dad arrives and we all get ready for sleep. My dad and I don't get along well these days. He was a drinking cowboy now turned Christian preacher. He's strict. Since he's become a Christian preacher he's always on me about how to dress and how to act, "girls don't wear those, only boys... why do you only wear that?!" and speaks about God this and that. Secretly in my heart I wish he was like how he was before. He treated me nice, liked me the way I am. I don't think he likes me now.

My parents talk about tomorrow's morning services as we all fall asleep. I am in

a fitful sleep when I hear my name mentioned. I listen. They don't know I am awake. They speak in hushed low tones. My dad says in that disapproving way of his, "I don't know... she's still such a tomboy, the way she acts and dresses... Maybe it's my fault. I always treated her like a son, I shouldn't have. We'll have to keep praying..." My mom stays quiet. But she murmurs something. They continue to talk about other matters. "Why didn't she say anything?" I think. Waves of pain, hurt and disappointment go through me. I never felt so alone. I feel my face on fire. It's a good thing I was faced the other way. Something in me tears, deep in my heart. My whole body wants to explode. I wish I was far, far away. I wish I was somewhere or someone else.

Humiliation, anger, runs up and down my veins, hot to cold. I lay still. I wish my heart would stop beating. Salty tears push out of the lids. The sharp pain stabs seemingly endless daggers into my heart.

Finally hatred wins; burns for him and me.

My first taste of hate. □

Ramona Medicine Crow is an artist living and working in New York City. She paints, writes, and does photography. Currently working in a gallery in SOHO. Originally from Montana (Crow Nation) she came out to New York for college at Parsons School of Design.



Chief Medicine Crow 2022
- Ramona Medicine Crow

Scientists Advocate for Native Cliché Alternatives

LOS ANGELES – In a recently released report, scientists have determined that the phrase "we have to tell our own stories" would have to be shaved, sterilized, and destroyed before it could be used anymore.

Their 380 page report goes on to state that "we have to tell our own stories" was by no means alone and cited nearly 40 other instances and close linguistic derivatives that would have to be discontinued as well, including "we have stories to tell" and "our stories must be told."

"We have allowed this phrase to exist well past its shelf date," said chief scientist Tom Smollit, "another year in existence could cost us millions in damages, lost work time, and mental anguish and detriment."

He went on to say that the use of the phrase had reached epidemic proportions and could now be found during dinner parties, boardroom meetings, financial requests, conferences, telephone conversations, professional emails, and even pick-up lines.

"It's really a matter of not having enough cliché's to lessen the blow," said second chief scientist Tom Vollit, "If we could only sit down and think about four to five more cliché's that we could summon at will when they are needed, we might not be in the situation we find ourselves in now."

Vollit went on to say that parents should talk to their children about personal responsibility when using cliché's and the damaging effects that can be incurred by using the same phrase over and over again.

The scientists, through a number of controlled experiments as well as empirical research gathered from studies on the phrases "today is a good day to die," "Custer died for your sins," "NDN", and using an upside down American Flag for



Tristan Ahtone

graphic imagery, were able reach their conclusion. However, their studies have only been able to offer suggestions for preventative measures.

The researchers warn that children who were discouraged from using cliché's at home were still at a high-risk of using them, with children ranging from kindergarten through college as particularly susceptible to using the phrase without thinking about the consequences.

Smollit went on to add that a shocking jump in the use of "we have to tell our own stories" in young people has taken place with the creation of diversity programs in film, television, print, and other communication and entertainment industries.

One of the many people who volunteered at Smollit's lab for research purposes, Billy Screeching Death Eagle With Salmon In Glistening Talons, is a recovering cliché user.

"I was an aspiring producer in Los Angeles for a number of years when I came across 'we have to tell our own stories'," said Screeching Death Eagle With Salmon In Glistening Talons, "It was catchy. It was full of ambiguity and mysticism. And when I used it on people, they sort of listened. They thought I was a spiritual guru from the past. After a while, I couldn't stop."

According to Screeching Death Eagle With Salmon In Glistening Talons his wake up call came at a diversity conference. "I was the fourth speaker to address executives at this Native initiative conference, and the three speakers in front of me all used the same line. By the time we came to the Q & A portion of the conference two of the speakers had developed lockjaw, one had swallowed his own tongue, and I thought I had developed tourettes as I kept uncontrollably screaming the phrase out over and over again. I blacked out and woke up two weeks later in Santa Fe, New Mexico with a blonde college girl named Sunshyne Feather Moccasin Woman. My world caved in on me; I knew I had to rethink my life and get help."

Smollit says that Screeching Death Eagle With Salmon In Glistening Talons' story is fairly common, and, in many cases, can be stopped early by identifying certain user characteristics.

In the study, researchers identified personality traits that made individuals prone to using "we have to tell our own stories." In men, it included having a pony-tail and/or braids, bone chokers, cowboy boots, wranglers, and a proclivity for music by Robert Mirabal; in women, excessive turquoise and silver jewelry, long skirts, fake tans, and a proclivity for music by Robert Mirabal were some of the dominant traits exhibited in chronic users.

Researchers also found that the use of clichés was more likely to occur when an individual was an aspiring independent filmmaker in search of money.

"A lot of people are using this phrase," Smollit said. "When they're at home, around people they know, around friends or family, they don't talk like that because they'll get made fun of. When they're out in the world, away from community supervision, they get promiscuous with their use of the English lan-

guage, and they end up taking dangerous risks that they wouldn't normally take."

In a sister study beginning this week, scientists will begin tests to create new Native clichés based on the research done by Smollit. The projected end date of the research is slated for August 31st, 2009, and scientists involved in the project hope that the new clichés will be varied enough to stand the test of time.

"We have to tell our own stories" came in to use during the early eighties when Native Americans began making their way in to the film and television industry. It quickly spread across Indian Country, becoming a battle cry for a number of years before becoming an old cliché. □

Tristan Ahtone is a member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma and a hack journalist. His work can be found at www.cowboykiller.com.



American Indian Artists, Inc.
c/o AFSC
15 Rutherford Place
New York, NY 10003
(212) 598-0968
www.amerinda.org

PLACE
STAMP
HERE



This publication is made possible in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts a State Agency

This publication is made possible in part with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER