



Prints

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Abenaki

Seeing photos
of ancestors
a century past

is like looking
at your own
fingerprints—

circles
and lines
you can't
recognize

until someone else
with a stranger's eye
looks close and says
that's you.



Indian Boarding School: The Runaways

LOUISE ERDRICH

Ojibwe (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)

Home's the place we head for in our sleep.
Boxcars stumbling north in dreams
don't wait for us. We catch them on the run.
The rails, old lacerations that we love,
shoot parallel across the face and break
just under Turtle Mountains. Riding scars
you can't get lost. Home is the place they cross.

The lame guard strikes a match and makes the dark
less tolerant. We watch through cracks in boards
as the land starts rolling, rolling till it hurts
to be here, cold in regulation clothes.
We know the sheriff's waiting at midrun
to take us back. His car is dumb and warm.
The highway doesn't rock, it only hums
like a wing of long insults. The worn-down welts
of ancient punishments lead back and forth.

All runaways wear dresses, long green ones,
the color you would think shame was. We scrub
the sidewalks down because it's shameful work.
Our brushes cut the stone in watered arcs
and in the soak frail outlines shiver clear
a moment, things us kids pressed on the dark
face before it hardened, pale, remembering
delicate old injuries, the spines of names and leaves.



Don't Bother the Earth Spirit

JOY HARJO

Muskogee Creek

Don't bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate, changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure earthquakes, lightning, the deaths of all those you love, the most blinding beauty. It's a story so compelling you may never want to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped.



Home and the Homeless

ELIZABETH WOODY

Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

The buildings are worn.

The trees are strong and ancient.

They bend against the grid of electric lines.

The windows are broken

by the homeless and the cold past.

I am home on the yard

that spreads mint, pales the Victorian roses,

takes into it the ravaged lilac tree.

The black bulk of plastic lies about

stopping unwanted weeds for the Landlord.

Tattered, the cedar tree is chipped to dry heaps of
recklessness.

The unwanted spreads by the power of neglect.

The wear of traffic says that we are out of time,
must hurry.

Age, the creak in the handmade screen door fades behind
itself.

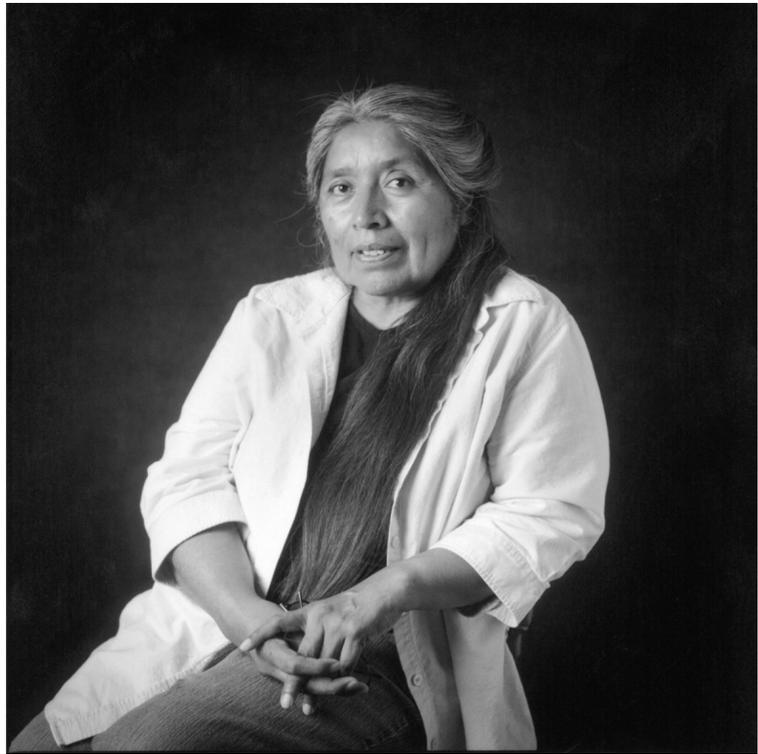


Can You Feel the Native American in Me

M. L. SMOKER

Assiniboine and Sioux

We pull into dirt driveway in Lara's blue Celica. The car came from her 18 money last year and it's got only one dent on the side from a white girl in Wolf Point who slammed the door of her boyfriend's Ford pick-up into the passenger side of Lara's then new car. Lara was pissed, got out to kick the girl's ass but they sped out of the Town Pump's parking lot too fast. That girl was scared. Lara came back to the car and we laughed at that dent, but most of all we laughed at that fear. Driveway to uncle's house, we're bumping Tupac, get out, step into sweat lodge. Got a sick auntie. Take in a towel, leave out hip-hop beat, add in hand drum. Our uncle forgives us this time for being late and we are more sorry for this than we were for quitting the basketball team or for getting pregnant last year.



Carrying Our Words

OFELIA ZEPEDA

Tohono O'odham Nation

We travel carrying our words.
We arrive at the ocean.
With our words we are able to speak
of the sounds of thunderous waves.
We speak of how majestic it is,
of the ocean power that gifts us songs.
We sing of our respect
and call it our relative.

Translated into English from O'odham by the poet.

T-ñi'oki' 'att 'an o 'u'akc o hihi
Am ka:ck wui dada.

S-ap 'am o 'a: mo has ma:s g kiod.
mat 'am 'ed.a betank 'i-gei.

'Am o 'a: mo he'es 'i-ge'ej,
mo hascu wud. i:da gewkdagaj
mac 'ab amjed. behě g ñe'i.

Hemhoa s-ap 'am o 'a: mac si has elid, mo d. 'i:mig.



Dakota Homecoming

GWEN NELL WESTERMAN

Dakota & Cherokee Nation

We are so honored that
you are here, they said.
We know that this is
your homeland, they said.
The admission price
is five dollars, they said.
Here is your button
for the event, they said.
It means so much to us that
you are here, they said.
We want to write
an apology letter, they said.
Tell us what to say.