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Yukhika-látuhse (She Tells Us Stories). Edited by Jim Stevens. Featured poet: E. Donald Two-Rivers. Oneida, WI: Oneida Nation Arts Program, 2009. 40 pages. \$6.00 paper.

Yukhika-látuhse (She Tells Us Stories) features creative works by Native writers, especially those from Wisconsin. Its mission is “to support the Indigenous voice” (40). The editorial board includes Oneida, Menominee, Oneida-Mohican, Seneca, and Ojibwa members. The simply made, staple-bound publication is enhanced by Michael Charette’s graphics and artwork; his borders on every page are especially attractive. As print-on-demand publishing creates even more bland standardization of books, this letter-sized, fine-paper magazine is a welcome change. This effort coordinates with the Native Writers Workshops, which sponsors outreach writing events at Wisconsin reservations and in Native communities. Besides the home Web site for Oneida Nation Arts, the journal also appears online (<http://yukhika.blogspot.com>). *Yukhika* represents a larger Native writing community.

The annual issues feature writings by better known writers—such as Maurice Kenny, Joseph Bruchac, Kimberly Blaeser, Bruce King, and Denise Sweet—as well as writers without established publishing records. This mix is what makes all literary journals exciting. The future emerges in such places. Lucy Rose Johns, the first writer in this issue, is not a recognized name—yet. She has won some local contests and has published in Wisconsin anthologies. Here she contributes a striking poem, “Katsitsyaká?waks.” This first-person narrative explains that the title, which is her name, translates to “she is sifting the flowers.” The writer continues to explain the contrast between a single rose stem framed in a vase and the Oneida connotation of a “service flower,” one that is:

for use in medicine, seasonings and food preparation,
designed for sturdiness,
to be chopped up, parceled out,
used in healing, strengthening, and encouraging. (5)

The poem returns to the present moment as the narrator passes a field of trillium, stops, and inhales both the scent and the understanding of the flowers as more than adornment. Almost all of the *Yukhika* poems are similar, sincere, first-person assertions. This unifies the group of writers; it also is a relief from the postmodernist layering of irony. This is accessible, honest writing.

The centerpiece of this issue of *Yukhika* is posthumous poetry by E. Donald Two-Rivers, a well-known Chicago performance poet and dramatist. He was originally from Sapowe, an Ojibwa town in Ontario, lived in Chicago most of

his adulthood, and spent his last days in Green Bay, Wisconsin (passing away in 2008). Eighteen full pages of his recent work comprise a chapbook within this issue.

Editor Jim Stevens gives a moving introduction to the section, “Remembering Ed Two-Rivers,” which includes a memory of Two-Rivers’s performance when he was in his prime. He is, according to Stevens, “something of a charismatic legend in the Chicago literary scene” (20). I met Two-Rivers at this time, during the summer of 2001, and his performance was so powerful that I immediately asked about publishing a book for him. This became his second book of poetry, *Powwows, Fat Cats, and Other Indian Tales* (2003). His first, *A Dozen Cold Ones* (1992), is a poetry best seller. He published a book of short stories, *Survivor’s Medicine* (1998), and a collection of plays from his Red Path Theatre Company, *Briefcase Warriors: Stories for the Stage* (2001).

Stevens’s comments are an important documentation of a twentieth-century Native writer who fought civil-rights battles with political activism and insightful word art. These *Yukhika* poems complete Two-Rivers’s body of work by describing his years in Green Bay. Stevens describes the poet’s “mettle” as he battled pancreatic cancer and gives a sense of his involvement with writing in Wisconsin. Stevens mentions a visit from Two-Rivers at the Oneida Arts cottage, toward the end of the poet’s life, bearing poems published by *Yukhika* in its fourth issue. This 2009 collection of poems comes from Fred Gaines, who submitted them for publication.

I particularly like “Garage Getaway,” a long, narrative poem that illustrates Two-Rivers’s ability to weave together present and past, sensory and abstract, and youth and age (22–23). It begins with a description of a Green Bay home workshop with smell of “sawdust and engine oil” (22). This reminds the narrator of his “old man” and the

fast moving city streets where
I carved out a living
in the machine shops. (22)

The “wood odors” transport him back to the Canadian woods and Kakabecka Falls (22). He recreates the place:

Oh I do remember still
the mist, the taste of that place—damp cool air.
I recall vividly the roar of water pounding against the rocks.
I remember looking around at the browns and greens
and too I can still envision the clear blue of the sky. (23)

In simple terms, he suggests the connection of a Native person like himself to the land, throughout life. He expands this individual experience to include an entire “tribal ethics” predicated on “generations of my people” who “have sat there lost in wonder at the falls” (23).

These poems show that Two-Rivers can be lyrical and urban as he describes nature:

I sat and waited in the van and noted
that the sky was as black as a prayer cloth.
There was no moon to illuminate it.
Over to the east a splotch of light
stitched the dark horizon to a darker sky. . . . (25–26)

The contemporary Ojibwa man sits in his van, not in an idealized natural setting. He describes the sky as a cloth and then continues the image with the “stitching” of light between horizon and “darker sky” (26). Another in this category is “October’s Poem,” which is about bird watching. I remember talking with the poet about his bird-watching days in Chicago, along the Lincoln Park lakefront—a perfect combination of rural and urban. This poem describes the Wisconsin woods’ birds:

a woodpecker snakes its
way down the large trunk . . .
a lone chick-a-dee
with a black cap
at a jaunty angle. (35–36)

Arresting images like these appear throughout the poems. Always, the sense of being a survivor, in Gerald Vizenor’s sense of the word, or “survivance,” is foremost.

Most of Two-Rivers’s poems are an extension of his activism. He expresses anger against poverty, discrimination, loss of culture, and any kind of phoni-ness. “The Lost War Party” satirizes Hollywood Indians and “Big League Movie Directors / frenzied for Indian images” (37). “Profiled Subversive” is about his father and his own experience as a prisoner. These are raw poems, with punctuation that is not always precise. They show poetry at its most potent, as an aspect of cultural sovereignty. Anishinaabe language and Red English slang lace through the work as well as a constant sense of history.

The focus on one writer, as in this issue of *Yukhika*, is a good precedent. Few magazines like *Yukhika* make Native writers’ works accessible. Also in this issue are works by the artist Michael Charette, Dawn Karima Pettigrew, Shirley Tourtillot, Richie Plass, Gladyce Nahbenayash, and Frank Cobb. Cobb’s

“Waabooz” is another strong poem, a portrait of a rabbit outside the window, “The nose / constantly working, taking in the smells around him” (18). Then follows a catalogue of what the *waabooz* smells, with rich details. Tourtillot’s poem “She Is” is a realistic depiction of four stages of a Native woman’s adult life, from fourteen to old age, ending with

Lean thighs that once raced down dirt roads
now, still lean, hobble with a purpose to the door.
A papery kiss on fat cheeks of infants and on
the cold skin of a husband and
She is tired.
She is. (13)

This shows the ability of the poet to create both narrative and lyric energy in words. The endurance of the old woman inspires. She, like Two-Rivers, endures and survives. *Yukhika* is a means to continue Native survivance, giving voice to traditions through print media, online presence, and community workshops.

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