

A Walk With The People

Celebrating More Than 10,000 Years of Shinnecock Indian History

Volume 2, Issue 2

A Publication of the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum

July-September 2003

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Dave McGary
Photo courtesy of
Fredrick DeMatteis Estate
(Artistic rendering by
Wendy Gardner
(Shinnecock))

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New Permanent Exhibit

The Frederick DeMatteis Collection: "My Spirit Dances Forever"

Opening Reception October 11, 2003 4:00 to 7:00 P.M.

The Board

The Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum has been so vibrant with activities and growth that it is hard to believe that we are now into the second year of our three-year grant from the Administration for Native Americans. (ANA) There are new faces in the building, and both ongoing innovative and solid programming continues with our exciting new exhibition to open on October 11, 2003. We are all extremely excited about the bronze statues that will constitute this event, and all of the members of the Shinnecock Nation can be proud of this fantastic acquisition. You will read more about the particulars elsewhere in the newsletter.

We, at the board, are now turning our attention to more aggressive fund raising this fall, including targeted grant writing in anticipation of the ending of the current grant with ANA. Sustainable funding and long-range planning has been incorporated into our overall mission and guiding principles because

without this vital tool, our Museum cannot be assured of ongoing success into the future. It is a challenge that must be met and addressed now, well before the summer of 2005.

In regard to grants, the board is pleased to announce that the Long Island Community Foundation recently awarded a grant in the amount of \$12,500 to the Nation for purposes of the Federal Recognition effort. This grant was developed and submitted on behalf of the Tribe prior to attaining its own tax-exempt status and will go directly to the Nation for that endeavor.

Financial support for the Museum is crucial, as there is substantial work inherent in the overall operation of our facility by our talented staff, as well as the vital role of our volunteers. Without our weekend warriors, the doors of the Museum would not be open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays, and we wish to publicly acknowledge the dedication of every one of you whom we have counted on to show up on sunny

Saturday mornings and rainy Sunday afternoons! A very special Tabutne! Needless to say, Museum board members continue to play a crucial supportive role throughout, and I have been extremely grateful on many occasions for the willingness of the board to give so freely of their time and effort.

Earlier newsletters announced the installation of flooring on the lower level of the building, and we are very proud to inform the community that beautiful laminate flooring will be in place by the time you are reading this newsletter and, of course, prior to the opening of the new exhibition! We really do have to crawl before we walk in many instances, and while we would love to have the entire lower level completed, this will have to come in time or when we have received additional funding. We believe that it will be a powerful experience when you view both the exhibit and the flooring!

We all look forward to the exciting months ahead and welcome your input and participation in whatever ways you wish to contribute.

Tabutne.

Winonah Warren, *Turtle Woman*
Board President

The First Year Is Only The Beginning

Greetings,

This issue marks the beginning of our second year. It has been an honor to serve as editor and one of the writers of this quarterly journal. The thousands of years of Shinnecock history and culture has made the task fairly easy. Our focus is predetermined. Our goal is to place part of this vast history before you, quarterly, to remind Tribal members of who we are, where we have been, and the rich heritage we carry with us. The same for subscribing members.

This past year, we have written about our ancestral lands, wampum,

the tragedy of the *Circassian*, and forts. We have profiled our Shinnecock artists and supported their efforts through the Museum Store. We have educated a host of school children and adults. We have had our second annual Winter Festival, a book fair and a Summer Food Fest. And even though we burned the lobsters, we are not deterred. We will get it right next summer.

Congratulations David Bunn Martine, who is now a published author. The book, an anthology entitled, "*Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing*," is now available at major book stores and puts David in

the company of the likes of Leslie Marmon Silko and Vine Deloria.

Welcome new staff members, Christine Cuffee and Shavonne Smith. Thank you Judy Williams and the rest of the crew for your weekend assistance, and thank you Vincent Cuffee for a job well done this summer on the grounds and interior.

With new staff in place, we now look forward to a great year, beginning with the opening reception for our newest permanent exhibit, the 20 bronze statues from the Estate of Frederick DeMatteis.

We are The People
Beverly Jensen, Editor

Education and Events

Staff, board and other tribal members stayed busy for numerous summer events.

Our 1st Annual "Summer Fest Native Style" Food & Fun Festival was held July 12th. Though unforeseen circumstances caused last minute hustle and bustle for the clambake, the beautiful weather, understanding at-

tendees and tasty foods helped make the event a success. Special thank you to Ben Haile for his lacrosse game demonstration and to the Shinnecock Youth Council Dancers who added to the day's festivities. Thank you to all who supported our fundraising endeavor.

On August 2nd, Shinnecock dancers Lynn Fletcher, Waban and Nadonis Tarrant, Sunbow and Alexandria Gomez, Mattahnequut Oquanumonut Wright, and Cholena Smith, danced and sang with lead Gordell Wright for a presentation at the Shelter Island Historical Society's fair, "One Day in History". Wendy Gardner and Beverly Jensen distributed museum info at the hands-on table while Janelle Moore and Josephine Smith made fry bread and fresh squeezed lemonade. Wickham Hunter was on hand to capture candid photos of the staff at work.

The blackout of 2003 could not darken the spirit of kinship which filled our Cultural Center on August 14th as members of the Shinnecock Nation welcomed 57 members of the Brothertown Indian Nation of Wisconsin with a potluck dinner. There were relatives meeting for the first

time, questions and answers, exchange of gifts and new friendships formed.

The Brothertown people are descendants of the Pequot and Mohegan tribes who joined with other Native Christian communities of Southern New England and Long Island in the late 1700's. They left

their homelands joining Samson Occum, a Mohegan, who had converted to Christianity, but wanted a native community away from the greed of the whites who pressured

land sales and leases. They were given land by the Oneidas of upstate New York, but eventually were forced to move west and finally settled in Wisconsin. (For more info go to www.brothertownindians.org.)

The trip to Shinnecock was just one stop along the "homecoming" journey this year. The Brothertown travelers also visited the Montauks here on Long Island, the Mohegans and Mashantucket Pequots of Connecticut and the Rhode Island Narragansetts. The visit was cut short due to the uncertainty of travel delays, but promises of return and invitations to their territory abound. We have heard from the coordinator of their trip, Nancy Lambert, who sends thanks to everyone for their hospitality. The museum staff would also like to thank our tribal members who donated food, helped out and were just here to say "Hakame! Welcome!"

Josephine Smith, Education
Events Planner

Calendar

Opening Reception
4:00 to 7:00 P.M.
The
Frederick DeMatteis
Collection,
"My Spirit Dances Forever"
at the
Shinnecock Nation
Cultural Center & Museum

Sat.
Oct. 11

**Cultural Enrichment
Classes for
Tribal Members**
Thursday Evenings
Beginning October 16th
6:30 to 8:30 P.M.
Oct. 16 Lower Level Multipurpose
Room

All ages are invited to share stories, history lessons, view videos, art, craft, dance techniques. Bring your projects or start new ones.

Beading Classes
(ages 14 & up)
Saturdays Oct. 25 thru
Nov. 22
11 A.M. to 1 P.M.
Advanced Registration
Required

Oct. 25
thru
Nov.
22

10/25: Ornaments - \$25
11/01: Daisy Chains - \$25
11/08: Seed Bead Weave - \$25
11/15: Seed Bead Weave - \$25
11/22: Bone Choker /
Bracelet - \$25

**Shinnecock Nation Tribal
Event**
Thanksgiving
Shinnecock Nation
Community Center

Nov.
28

**3rd Annual Winter Arts
Festival**
at the
Shinnecock Nation Cultural
Center and Museum

Dec.
13 &
14

From the Director Curator

Ever since the Shinnecock Nation Museum received the gift of the twenty sculptures, 14 of which were created by the well known western sculptor Dave McGary, I have been curious to find out more about McGary's life and work.

The opportunity presented itself in August during the week of my twentieth reunion celebration at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

That week was a flurry of activity. I knew that I would be meeting my cousin at the Mescalero Apache Reservation in South Central New Mexico, as well, and was thrilled to find that McGary had a studio/gallery at Ruidoso, less than half an hour from where I would be staying. Finding out that he would be in town on the exact weekend I would be visiting, was indeed very fortunate.

Born on a ranch in 1958 in Cody, Wyoming, Dave McGary is an imposing 6 feet 4 inches tall. He and his wife, Molly, divide their time between homes and studio/galleries in Scottsdale, Arizona and Ruidoso, New Mexico.

McGary said he became interested in metal fabrication from an artist/coach of his schooldays. It was during this time that his step-grandmother introduced him to well-known western sculptor, Harry Jackson who in turn was instrumental in facilitating an apprenticeship for him under master sculptors in Italy.

McGary was initially intrigued by the technical aspects of creating armatures and cast reproduction methods – and experimented with the full-scale creative end of sculpting. Working with Harry Jackson,

he became self-taught in anatomy and the ancient methods of the old master sculptors.

McGary said that Jackson once told him that everyone had inside him a special energy or force, his own particular creative flame, and that it was everyone's job to protect that flame, to keep it burning, to



Sculptor Dave McGary at his Ruidoso, New Mexico studio with David Bunn Martine. Between them is a version of "Symphonies of the Heart." A larger version now resides at the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum.

always provide it with the necessary fuel to keep it alive. This credo has followed McGary throughout his life. Today, the motto "There are no limits" is displayed prominently in his studio and work environment.

McGary's own deep involvement in portraying Indians of the Great Plains in the most heroic and sensitive imagery came about through an invitation to assist in a sun dance ceremony of Gerald Red Elk, whom he had met at a sculpture foundry he was working with at the time.

His intimate experiences at this occasion and the personal acquaintances he established then and since remain with McGary and solidified his deeply felt relationship to the Northern Plains Tribes.

The artistic identity of McGary is generally classified as a contemporary equivalent of the early groundbreaking pioneers in the history of western American art. George Catlin, Carl Bodmer, Charles Bird King and Charles Russell are some of McGary's predecessors who specialized in early accurate portrayals of the American Indian before and during the early days of European contact. They painted as they saw it at the time, always with the intent to report and ennoble. McGary's particular strength lies in his ability to sculpt a life-like action and vitality that depicts a material culture and life-ways of the past, springing forth from the platform of his intimate knowledge of the Native people he knows today.

While his sculptured images are historically based, they radiate a stark sense of the immediate. The book, "McGary," describes "a level of success and popularity in no small part because [McGary] is able to capture in his work the very ideals that we as a nation most want to support and perhaps feel in danger of losing. Strength of character, bravery and valor in the face of overwhelming odds, a reverence of and attachment to nature, a respect for the wisdom of elders, and strong connection to the mystic or spiritual realm are all themes that are explored and personified in McGary's work."

The Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center is grateful for the generous bequest of Frederick DeMatteis for the rich and dramatic additions to our exhibits.

David Bunn Martine,
Director and Curator

*"McGary, American Realism in Bronze," by Michael Duty, published by McGary Studios, Ruidoso, NM

A Gift from the Heart

Bequeathed to the Museum two years ago, they were finally delivered, some two to a crate, one day this summer. Even boxed and crated, these 20 images radiated back to everyone who peeked at them a sense of awe and wonder. Awe at the powerful images staring back from the crates, and wonder about the man who willed them.

The man was Brooklyn-born Frederick DeMatteis, a U.S. Army World War II decorated hero. At the time of his death, he was head of the DeMatteis Organizations, one of the largest privately owned development and construction companies in the country. The organization is based in Uniondale and located in one of the company's premiere building projects—the EAB plaza. Frederick DeMatteis was an international developer, a real estate magnate, and a philanthropist who died in 2001 at age 78, leaving behind a wife, Nancy, four children and 13 grandchildren. He was also a collector of Native American art.

The answer to why he willed 20 bronze statues averaging 3 feet in height to a small and struggling Indian museum instead of a big city institution, came from Donald Schaeffer, the estate executor.

"Frederick DeMatteis had a deep reverence for Native Americans," said Schaeffer. "He loved Long Island and he understood the importance of the Shinnecock Indians in Long Island history. When it was time to make a decision about what to do with them, for him it was natural that they stay on the Island with the Shinnecock."

And so began the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum's latest permanent exhibit: The Frederick DeMatteis Collection that the staff entitled, *My*

Spirit Dances Forever.

In addition to the powerful works of contemporary Western artists, Dave McGary, Joe Beeler, a co-founder of the Cowboy Artists of America, Bob Parks, and Tracy Beeler (daughter of artists Joe and Sharon Beeler), the Frederick DeMatteis Collection includes one work by C.E. Dallin.

C.E. (Cyrus Edwin) Dallin died in 1943, and thereafter seemed relegated to the back pages of art history. Yet, he produced one of the most famous figures in the world, "Appeal to the Great Spirit". Originally a sculpture, "Appeal" has been copied and painted into uncounted numbers of art forms. However, it is Dallin's not quite so famous "Indian on a Horse," that now resides at the Shinnecock Nation Museum.

Beverly Jensen

The Collection

Dave McGary

1. When Lightning Strikes
2. American Horse
3. My Spirit Dances Forever
4. Short Bull
5. Young Men of the Enemy Fear His Horses
6. Long Soldier
7. Four Bears
8. Symphonies of the Heart
9. Iron Hail
10. Chief Washakie
11. The Rainmaker
12. Point of No Return
13. Grey Hawks Legacy
14. Walks Among the Stars

Bob Parks

15. Renegade
16. Winds of Victory

Joe Beeler

17. Vengeance
18. Lord of the Southern Plains

Tracy Beeler

19. In the Ways of My Grandmother

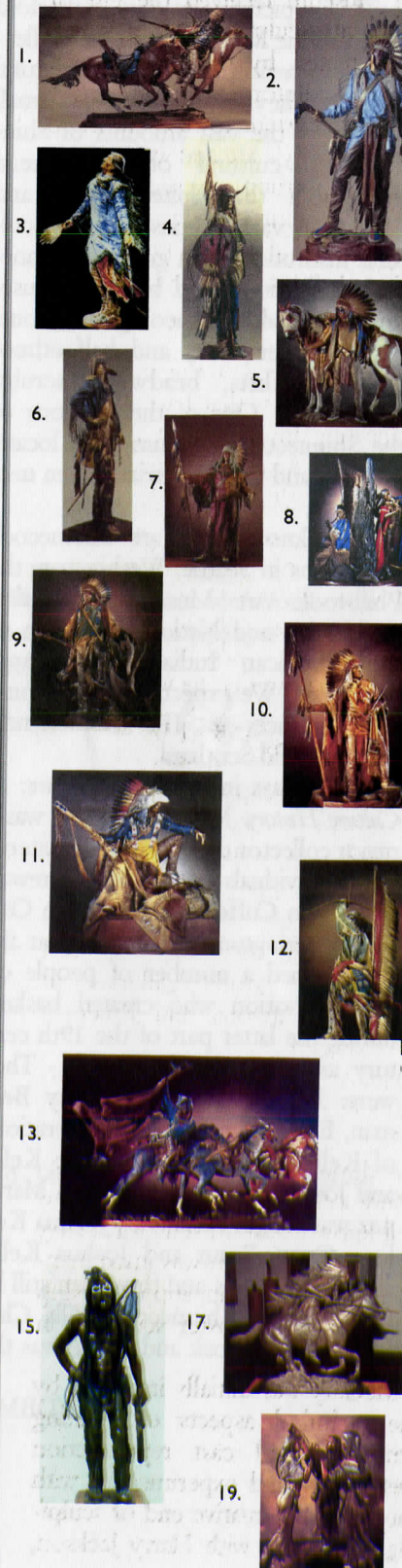
C.E. Dallin

20. Indian on a Horse



A painted version of "Appeal to the Great Spirit".

Exerpts From The Frederick DeMatteis Collection "My Spirit Dances Forever"



Photos courtesy of the DeMatteis Estate

Shinnecock Basketry: An Ancient Shinnecock Tradition at the American Museum of Natural History

The pictures in this centerfold are from the M. R. Harrington Collection at American Museum of Natural History. They represent a very small portion of the vast amounts of Shinnecock cultural objects spread throughout the United States and Europe in various museums and cultural institutions. In general, Shinnecock collections held by other museums are half archaeological (stone, bone, ceramic, etc.) and half ethnological (baskets, beadwork, scrubs, wood, etc.) One of the missions of the Shinnecock Museum is to locate, evaluate and then repatriate when necessary.

We know there are Shinnecock collections in Seattle, Washington; the Philbrook Art Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma; and National Museum of the American Indian in Suitland, Maryland. We expect to find Shinnecock artifacts in The Netherlands, England, and Scotland.

As it says in *Shinnecock Indians: A Culture History*, M.R. Harrington was a major collector of Shinnecock material from individuals such as Mary Brewer, Mary Ann Cuffee and Wickham Cuffee. Harrington's information at the time named a number of people on the reservation who created baskets during the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century. They were: Frances Bunn, Anthony Beaman, Eliza Beaman, three generations of Kellis, Daniel Bunn, Jake Kellis and Joshua Kellis. Alice Bunn Martinez was taught baskets by Joshua Kellis. Oscar Bunn and Joshua Kellis also caned chairs and those can still be found at the Shinnecock Hills Club House. White oak and maple was the material.

(DBM)



Catalog # 50_3483: Basket, tray form, purchased from David Kellis, who said it was old.



Catalog # 50_3485: Basket without handle from David Kellis



Catalog # 50_3484: Open work basket by Charity Kellis

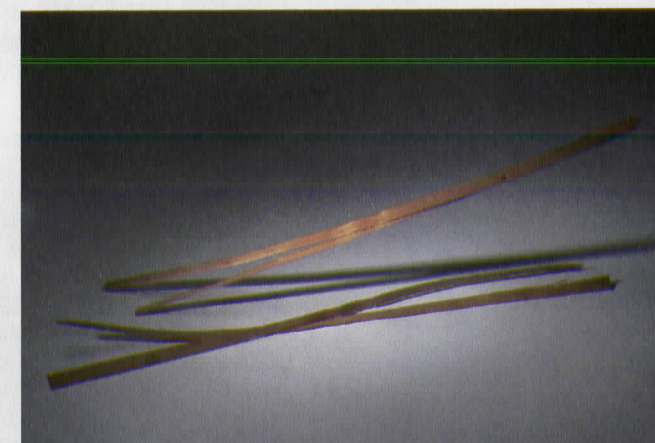
All photographs Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History



Catalog # 50_3486 Basket, modern form, with handle from Mary Brewer



Catalog # 50_3487 Basket, modern form, with handle; from a Mrs. Waters (thought to be made by Mary Brewer).



Catalog # 50_3488 Maple splints used in basket making

Our Spirits Dance Forever

As they entered the grounds, the young ladies caused broad smiles and excited whispers among the bystanders: "The Shinnecocks are here! The Shinnecocks are here!"

The Shinnecocks were invited guests in August at the 350th anniversary of European settlers arriving at Manhasset-aha-quash-a-warnuck, the island sheltered by islands, known today as Shelter Island, ancestral home of the Manhasset Indians, land of Poggaticut, their mightiest Sachem.

Poggaticut entered the spirit world in the mid 1600s. His passage and funeral march from Shelter Island to Montauk is part of the oral history as was probably depicted by Nathan J. Cuffee, Shinnecock-Montaukett co-author of *Lords of the Soil, Indians of Long Island*.^{*} This historical novel, touted as "lightly veiled fiction," is about the settling of the East End and the settlers' relationships to the First Inhabitants—the Montauketts, Shinnecocks and neighboring tribes:

"With measured steps they took their way on the march to the burial place,...all habited in gala attire, as befitted the occasion..

"A long line of warriors and braves followed; the procession swelled to a great concourse at Dancing Meadow, where the deputation of Mattitucks, under their Sachem, Momometou, joined the train.

"There was a formal exchange of greetings, then, observing a decorous silence, the entire party entered the capacious canoes, and obedient to the swift strokes of the paddles the little flotilla glided across the waters of Peconic Bay.

"Disembarking at Hog-a-nock, they resumed their march through Accobonac, to Amagansett, where they were joined by Nowedanah and his Shinnecock warriors. Again, formal greetings were exchanged, and the journey was resumed."

Poggaticut's funeral as described by Cuffee "documents" a Shinnecock-Manhasset gathering. The Shinnecock-Manhasset "gathering" that took place in August, came nearly 350 years later.

Whether they came into the Shelter Island circle as Traditional dancers

Dance is an event that evolves, as the poet said, until you cannot tell the dancer from the dance.

ers in buckskins and fringes, or more modern and colorful Fancy dancers, or Jingle Dress dancers, the young girls of Shinnecock carried with them a history of dance that goes back thousands of years. Dance has been part of tribal traditions since the dawn of time.

For the past 57 years, the Shinnecock Nation has opened its doors to the public for its annual powwow. Etched forever in the mind's eye of anyone who has attended any one of the 57 powwows is the opening Lord's Prayer Sacred Dance performance by Elizabeth Bess Haile, *Chee Chee*.

Again, as tradition would have it, she is teaching the younger members of her family, her granddaughters and nieces, the intricacies of the sacred dance.

There are also powwow performances of the Veterans Dance, honor-

ing those who fought for America, the Mother Country, Turtle Island, and the Rabbit, Stomp, Smoke, Hoop and War Dances.

In Native American cultures, dance is communication, sacred movement, story telling. Dance is prayer and celebration. There are dances for war and peace, death and birth, planting, harvesting and courtship. There are dances to emulate the spirits of animals and birds, such as deer, buffalo and eagle, or to ward off illness and evil.

As a social issue, becoming a dancer means overcoming shyness, subverting ego and connecting heart-beat to drum beat.

Dance evolves from the first unsteady steps of babes into the powerful steps and motions of elders. As elder's dance, they tell the story of an important event, a life, a family, a people. Dance can connect this world with the World of Spirit. True dance is an event that evolves, as the poet said, until you cannot tell the dancer from the dance.

The last Manhasset family left Shelter Island just recently. Their history and culture is now enshrined in a small chapel-turned-museum a short drive from the ferry. But tradition teaches that the Indian Spirit never leaves its homeland. And when the young Shinnecock girls came to dance, there was no doubt that the Spirit of the Manhassetts danced with them.

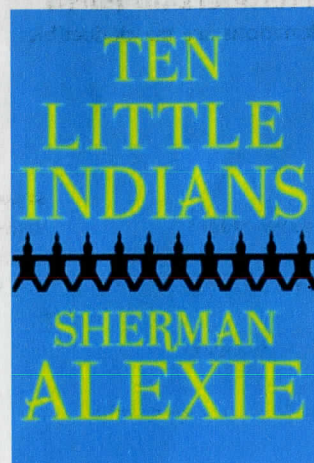
Beverly Jensen

^{*} "Lords of the Soil" by Lydia A. Jocelyn and Nathan J. Cuffee; published in 1905 by C.M. Clark Publishing, Boston, MA

Photo captions: Young Shinnecocks at the Shelter Island Historical Museum in August; clockwise from upper right: Cholena Smith (Fancy); Lynne Fletcher (Traditional); Sunbow Gomez (Fancy); Mattah Wright (Fancy); Alexandria Gomez (Jingle Dress); Nadonis Tarrant (Traditional); Mattah Wright, Nadonis Tarrant. Center: Elizabeth (Chee Chee) Haile interpreting The Lord's Prayer at a 1980s Shinnecock Powwow.



Book Review



Title: "Ten Little Indians"
 Author: Sherman Alexie
 (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene)
 Publisher: Grove Press (2003)

Objections have been raised by Native Americans for generations about the children's play song, "Ten Little Indians," which has been used to teach children to count forwards and backwards. It is the backwards count that Native Americans have found

offensive. "Ten little, nine little, eight little Indians..." until the Indian is down to "one little Indian boy."

This seemingly innocent play song has been called a song of genocide in disguise, so it was interesting to find out what Sherman Alexie did with the controversial title.

What the winner of the American Book Award and the writer of several best selling books did was write stories about nine fictitious members of the Spokane Indian Tribe. The tales are humorous and tragic, mystical and raw. They move from the particular to the universal, and in doing so, the Indians become people experiencing, coping, and in some way, triumphing, if not, at least, making peace with, the troubles in their lives.

There is a story of conflict within an Indian and white marriage, happily resolved; problems faced and made peace with by a young man, the result of a black and Indian marriage.

One of the most poignant stories is about a drunk who stumbles upon his deceased grandmother's regalia in a pawn shop, and moves heaven and

earth to purchase it back, fails miserably in each attempt, drinks or gives away any money he earns toward meeting the pawnbroker's deadline for buying it back.

As the deadline comes and goes, he is totally defeated and depressed. But the story doesn't end there. The man is redeemed in the last few paragraphs by an act that neither he nor the pawnbroker can fully explain. The pawnbroker simply gives the regalia to the man, and as he walks off, ecstatic and in possession of some concrete item that connects him to his grandmother, the reader is left hoping he has been reformed by his miracle, but willing to accept the possibility that he and the regalia will part company as soon as he needs a drink.

Sherman Alexie's other recent books include, "Reservation Blues," "The Toughest Indian in the World," "Indian Killer," and "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist-fight in Heaven." Alexie is also the writer of the award-winning screenplay, "Smoke Signals".

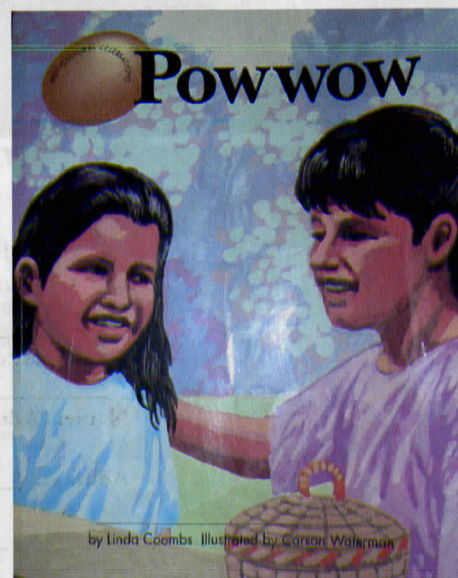
(BJ)

Recommended Reading

Title: "Powwow"
 Author: Linda Coombs
 (Gay Head Wampanoag)
 Illustrators: Carson Waterman
 (Seneca-Snipe Clan)

Publishers: Modern Curriculum Press for The Children's Museum, Boston

Level: For ages 4 to 10



Tina Howowswee's moccasins have a hole in the bottom and are too small. How can she compete in the Fancy Dance where she will also be judged on her regalia?

Readers are invited to suggest titles for book reviews or to submit written reviews for consideration by the editorial staff.

All submissions must be typewritten or on disk.

For more information, contact the editorial staff.

Membership

The door to more than 10,000 years of history



Become a Member

Join the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum

Share in the history and culture of an Ancient people of Long Island. Select a membership category and receive special benefits. Participate in exciting events. Your tax-deductible membership fees will help the Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum in

- maintaining our permanent exhibit, "A Walk With The People,"
- developing an operating budget,
- completing the healing white pine building, and
- securing new exhibitions, publications, and special events.

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Phone:
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 Fax:
 631-287-7153

email: shinnecockmuseum@yahoo.com

Membership Director:
 Lynne Marshall

Annual Membership Form

All fees and donations are tax-deductible.

Please check one:

General
Student* \$15.00
Senior* (65 years and older) \$15.00
Individual (One adult 18 and over) \$35.00
Family (Two adults and their children) \$55.00

Benefits:

- Free admission to permanent exhibit
- Subscription to Museum quarterly
- 10% discount at Museum Store

Contributing (Turtle Clan) \$250.00

Benefits:

- All of the above, plus
- Official Museum Tee Shirt
- 2 Guest passes for admission

Supporting (Deer Clan) \$500.00

Benefits:

- All of the above, plus
- Museum Logo Tote Bag
- 2 Additional Guest passes

Patron (Eagle Clan) \$1000.00 (and up)

Benefits:

- All of the above, plus
- Limited-edition art
- Acknowledgment on Museum's Patron Plaque

My membership is ☐ New ☐ Renewal
 Annual Membership \$
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 (*Please include the following: Students, a copy of current student I.D.; Seniors, proof of age.)

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And by Special Appointment
Sunday 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.
11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.
Wednesday thru Saturday
Hours

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**The Shinnecock Nation
Cultural Center and Museum is
funded in part by Administration
for Native Americans (ANA),
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human
Services and the Town of
Southampton.**

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A Walk With the People

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Advisors: Elizabeth Haile, David
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Submission Policy

The Editors will review and
consider all materials submitted to
this publication. Final
determination is at the discretion
of the Editorial Staff.

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Artists Profile: The Thunder Bird Sisters

In the year 2000, they won the Native American Music Award for Best Country and Folk Artists for their album, "Still Singing." But Shinnecock's own Thunder Bird Sisters are not all singers. Nor are they all sisters or all female, either. They are the grandchildren of the late Henry (Chief Thunder Bird) and Edith Bess. Chief Thunder Bird was Ceremonial Chief for the Shinnecock Powwow for many years.

Becky Genia is lead singer. Margo Thunder Bird is a song writer. And brothers and sisters, the Reverend Holly Haile, Tina Tarrant, Ben and Scott Haile, sing the high note backup and low note base, strum guitar and blow harmonica. Mom, Elizabeth Haile, also narrates a song.

In Country Western and contemporary Indian style, The Thunder Birds can twang and wey-ya-ho with the best, as their award winning performances attest. But it is in their soft and haunting tribute to the *Circassian*, a cargo ship that sank off Mecox Bay in 1876 taking the lives of nine Shinnecock men, that they tell the world who they truly are. Their CDs are available in the Museum Store.

(BJ)

