

VOICES FROM PEJUHUTAZIZI

DAKOTA STORIES AND STORYTELLERS

Teresa Peterson and Walter LaBatte Jr.



The publication of this book was supported through a generous grant from the Elmer L. and Eleanor Andersen Publications Fund.

Text copyright © 2021 by Teresa Peterson and Walter LaBatte Jr. Other materials copyright © 2021 by the Minnesota Historical Society. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write to the Minnesota Historical Society Press, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

Unless otherwise credited, all historic photographs were provided by the authors and all contemporary photographs were taken by Karen Odden.

mnhspress.org

The Minnesota Historical Society Press is a member of the Association of University Presses.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Ⓢ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

International Standard Book Number

ISBN: 978-1-68134-184-2 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-68134-185-9 (e-book)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021946451

This and other Minnesota Historical Society Press books are available from popular e-book vendors.

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Introduction	1
Dakota Stories and Storytellers	2
Coming Together	5
Part 1. Returning through Story	7
Part 2. The Voices	19
Wasicunhdinažin—Walter LaBatte Jr.	19
Wihake—Genevieve Pearsall LaBatte	21
Tiwakarḡhoksina—Walter LaBatte Sr.	24
Wakarḡtiomaniwiḡ—Eunice Amos	25
Wanḡbdiska—Fred Pearsall	26
Tasinususbecawiḡ—Her Dragonfly Shawl Woman	28
Part 3. The Stories	31
Stories Impart Values	31
<i>Woohitika—Courage, Bravery</i>	32
<i>Wookiya—Helping Others, Being Helpful</i>	35
<i>Miniheca—Working Hard, Being Active</i>	36
<i>Oḡarḡwaste—Generosity</i>	41
<i>Woohoda—Respect</i>	41
<i>Wowaditake—Fortitude</i>	42
<i>Waihakta—Humility</i>	42
<i>Wapidapi—Gratitude</i>	43
<i>Mitakuye Owasin—All My Relations</i>	44
Stories Transmit Traditions	45
<i>The Buffalo Hunt</i>	46
<i>Wamnaheza and Paḡdayapi</i>	50
<i>Waskuya</i>	58
<i>Waḡpe</i>	58

<i>Canpa</i>	58	
<i>Pejuta</i>	59	
<i>Storytelling</i>	61	
<i>Dakota Caže</i>	62	
<i>Dakota Iapi</i>	64	
<i>Traditional Brain Tanning</i>	71	
<i>Beading and Moccasin Making</i>	77	
<i>Drum Making</i>	84	
<i>Wacipi</i>	86	
<i>Dakota Presbytery</i>	88	
<i>Funerals</i>	95	
Stories Deliver Heroes		100
<i>Nasuna Taŋka</i>	100	
<i>Many Feathers/Ornaments</i>	105	
<i>Mato</i>	108	
<i>The Warrior Who Lost His Brother</i>	111	
<i>Story of a Young Brave</i>	112	
<i>The Bear Story</i>	114	
<i>Itesanyapi</i>	116	
<i>Indian Ball Players</i>	116	
<i>Weasel</i>	116	
Stories Reconcile		117
<i>Wasičuy</i>	117	
<i>Aftereffects</i>	121	
<i>The Battle of the Little Big Horn, 1876</i>	123	
<i>Name Changing</i>	125	
<i>Tribal Governance</i>	126	
<i>Land Claim Settlements</i>	127	
<i>Šiceca</i>	128	
<i>Institutional Racism</i>	129	
<i>Owaŋgwašte Wokağa—Making Beauty</i>	130	
Stories Entertain		131
<i>The Tame Tatanka</i>	131	
<i>Close Encounters</i>	133	
<i>Tawapahaḥota</i>	134	
<i>Learning Ojibwe</i>	135	
<i>The Cellar</i>	136	
<i>Reverend Tang</i>	137	
<i>Lonesome</i>	137	
<i>Exhibition Dancing</i>	138	

<i>Tataŋka Oyate</i>	138	
<i>Wamdoša</i>	139	
<i>The Host</i>	139	
<i>Bone Broth Soup</i>	140	
<i>The Crow</i>	140	
<i>The Rooster</i>	141	
<i>Synchronicity</i>	141	
<i>Pandemic Travels</i>	142	
Stories Tell of Place		142
<i>The Eastern Dakota Bands</i>	142	
<i>Place Names</i>	143	
<i>Know Your People</i>	147	
<i>Maya Bdeġa</i>	147	
<i>Owobopte Wakpa</i>	149	
<i>Rice Creek</i>	149	
<i>Caŋsaša Wakpadaŋ</i>	149	
<i>Upper Sioux Agency</i>	150	
<i>Heku and Kahmin</i>	151	
<i>Pejuhutazizi</i>	152	
Stories Provide Belonging		154
<i>Susbe</i>	155	
<i>Refugees</i>	155	
<i>The Return</i>	159	
<i>Flandreau Settlement</i>	160	
<i>Visiting Family</i>	161	
<i>Starting Over</i>	162	
<i>Hotonŋona</i>	163	
<i>Brown Earth, Sisseton</i>	165	
<i>Coming Home</i>	166	
<i>Hotonŋona's Death</i>	167	
<i>Wicaŋe</i>	168	
<i>Legacy</i>	169	
Part 4. A Story of Belonging		171
Acknowledgments		177
Notes on Editing and Orthography		179
Family Tree		181
Notes to Sidebars		185
Glossary		189
About the Authors		195

PREFACE

Hau mitakuyapi. Greetings, my relatives.

When my grandfather Waṅbdiska died, almost all the adults among our extended family had the same lament: they wished they had written down all of Grandpa's stories. We did not know that Grandpa had, himself, recorded a number of them. In doing this, he preserved such knowledge for the next generations. So, by the same reasoning, I want to preserve the stories I heard in my youth from the elders of that era and to record my experiences of growing up on Pejuhutazizi. When I tell these stories, I am not speaking on behalf of anyone but myself and my family. These are the stories as I heard them and as I tell them. Other people may know different versions of these stories, and they're all good, all part of our community's cultural wealth.

I wonder if the elders of my youth ever noticed that I was listening and recording in my memory all the stories they told and wondered if I would become the storyteller of today. Those elders included my grandfather Waṅbdiska, all my aunts and uncles, Annie Adams, Eliza Cavender, Elizabeth Blue, Maude Ortley, and a host of others. None ever said, "Now remember this." It was all in an ordinary telling of seemingly little significance. I wonder, Who among the young of today is also listening, remembering, preparing to be the storyteller of tomorrow?

Ho hecetu, mitakuye owasiṅ.

Wašicunḡhdinaṅiṅ—Walter "Super" LaBatte Jr.

INTRODUCTION

*A people without the knowledge of their past history,
origin and culture is like a tree without roots.*

—MARCUS GARVEY

Francis tipped his cowboy hat back, looked at me, and said, “Your tree has no roots.” I replied with silence and a blank stare. I looked down at my wispy, blowing-in-the-wind tree, drawn on the stark white eleven-by-fourteen-inch paper.

“You’re searching for something,” he declared.

This time I responded with a bewildered “What? What am I looking for?”

“That’s for you to figure out,” he replied.

And that was that. My *tree reading* was over. With nothing more to say, I shook his hand and thanked him. No epiphanies, no *Aha Oprah* moments. Thoughts briefly wafted through my mind on the drive home—I knew it was significant, but I was frustrated with my apparent lack of tree interpretation.

That was the spring of 2000. I was a wife and mother of two- and four-year-old boys, and I was working as a postsecondary counselor at a charter school serving predominantly Native students. We began our days with smudging, with the students circled around the drum singing the Dakota Flag Song. This cultural grounding happened before we moved into the academic routine. Our days were rooted in Dakota worldview, coupled with experiential learning and the traditional book learning. The small base of students and staff allowed us the flexibility to participate in community events, workshops, and conferences—those often filled by adults. It offered relevant and engaging educational experiences not often found in textbooks. We learned together, students and staff. One such community event included a two-day Red Road Gathering. During that second day of the workshop, with very little

instruction, we were each asked to draw a tree. I had anxiously awaited my turn for a tree reading and wondered what someone could possibly glean from my dismally drawn and uninteresting tree.

I did not understand what any of this meant then, but it stuck with me over the years. It has taken me all this time to return to that place, now with more insight. I was, in essence, a tree with no roots. I grew up visiting my mother's family at the Upper Sioux Community, which we know as Pejuhutazizi K'api, the Place Where They Dig the Yellow Medicine. What I had understood and learned of my culture up to that point provided a foundation for my Dakota identity. And yet, in hindsight, I was missing so much. I once heard that knowing *who* you are has every bit to do with knowing *whose* you are. How does one come to understand who one belongs to? Dakota ia, Utuhu Caŋ Cistiŋna emakiyapi ye—*In Dakota, they call me Little Oak Tree*. I am the granddaughter of many . . . many of whom brought me here to this place in time.

I now realize it is stories that carry us from our past to our present and into our collective future. Many of the stories in this collection are of resiliency and strength, courage and fortitude. My ancestors' stories remind me that I am here not by chance, but for purpose. I am *meant* to be here. I have come to understand that we all have story. Our story shapes our sense of belonging and place in the world. When we know our story, we belong—no matter where we go, where we are.

Dakota Stories and Storytellers

Within our community, there are two types of stories. Wicooyake stories include history, migration, and genealogy of the people. Hituŋkakanpi stories include tales, legends, and myths. Both types of stories do more than entertain. They enlarge the mind and stimulate imagination. Hituŋkakanpi and wicooyake stories are sometimes kept alive through rare written accounts, yet some Dakota families and communities continue to rely upon the oral traditions of gifted storytellers.

The role of the storyteller is to preserve history and legend, pass on traditions and values, connect listeners to people and place, and entertain. Ella Deloria, a Dakota linguist, ethnographer, and author from the early 1900s, wrote of Dakota storytellers who could recall three hundred winter counts, all from memory and without error. Storytelling

is a gift, and storytellers are loved and respected. The primary storytellers in this collection are my great-grandpa Waᅇbdiska, aka Fred Pearsall, and my uncle, dekᅇi mitawa, Waᅇicuᅇhdinaᅇiᅇ—aka Walter “Super” LaBatte Jr.

Waᅇbdiska shares Dakota stories from long ago, including those he heard from his mother-in-law, Taᅇinasusbecawiᅇ, my great-great-grandmother. Grandpa Fred—he was my great-grandfather, but I know him as Grandpa Fred—intended to publish his stories but did not live long enough to realize his goal. In 1983, his daughter Waᅇske, aka Cerisse Pearsall Ingebritson, typed up and self-published a small edition of his stories as a book. She titled it *Short Stories and History of Dakota People (Sioux)* by Fred Pearsall, and she included sketches by her nephew Dean Blue. A reporter from the local newspaper interviewed her and reported that she “did it partly for those who still remember her father . . . but the book holds much for those much younger as well.” Mom gave me her copy when I left for college, and neither of us realized the importance of it at the time. It is long out of print, so my copy, now tattered and held together with a rubber band, is a treasured family heirloom.

In the 1990s, I was able to ask Cerisse about the book while visiting her sunny home in Phoenix. She was my grandma Genevieve’s older sister—my great-aunt, but in the Dakota way, she would have just been my grandma. During these visits, I learned more about her and her sisters’ early lives. She described how she and my grandma had to harness the horses to the wagon when they wanted to travel. She shared that she and Grandma were the first Indians to graduate from the public school in town, and she told me, “I don’t know how Gen graduated because she never studied.” While the sisters remained close, their demeanor and lifestyles seemed completely different. Cerisse lived a more prim and refined life, my grandma more common and comforting, much like my own mother. I appreciate both. Cerisse introduced me to new ideas, like Native art. She shared a story of having kept a friendship with R. C. Gorman, the famous Navajo painter, and she supported other artists with purchases of baskets, beadwork, and paintings. She encouraged me to pursue further education and a career, and I imagine that resonated with her own independent life. Eventually, we decided that I would rewrite her book so that others might enjoy her father’s



Interviewing Great-Aunt Cerisse in the kitchen of her sunny home in Phoenix, 1990s.

stories. I am reminded of that promise as I walk from room to room in my home—an art card signed by Gorman and sent to Cerisse that hangs in my office, her baskets displayed in the living room, and a large oil painting from another artist hanging in my dining room. She died late in the summer of 2011, two weeks before her 101st birthday.

This collection joins the stories from Grandpa Fred contained in Cerisse's book with my uncle's stories. Deksi Super, or Wašicuŋhdi-nažij, shares his own memories and stories he heard growing up in Pejuhutazizi. From time to time, I heard Deksi tell stories when he was giving a talk for a group, or at some formal presentation I had wheedled him into making. Sometimes, when I asked him for advice on some dilemma, he would tell me a story and expect me to figure out the solution on my own. On these occasions it might take me days to figure out what teaching the story had to offer. Recognizing his gift of stories and storytelling, I asked Deksi to join me in completing this book project. With differing motivations, voices, and perspectives, we have had to figure out an amicable route for the book together. More importantly, we both agree stories are meant to be shared and passed from one generation to the next.

Coming Together

This project has taken detours, gotten lost, found new roads, and evolved into a broader collection of stories. *Voices from Pejuhutazizi: Dakota Stories and Storytellers* is organized into four parts. Part 1 answers the question “Why are these stories important to me?” Because I am the narrator, you will hear some of my stories from Pejuhutazizi: my own early experiences, and what happens when you learn the stories of your family and community.

Part 2 introduces the primary characters in the stories and traces the connections between them through four generations.

Part 3 is the collection of stories from Waŋbdiŋka and Wašičuŋhdi-nažinj. The stories are organized thematically, and they offer intersections across generations.

Stories impart values—teaching us how to live and behave from one generation to the next.

Stories transmit traditions—passing on cultural practices that give tribute and honor to unique ways of being and doing.

Stories deliver heroes—inspiring us through the actions of others, especially those we have not read about in school and can’t find in history books.

Stories reconcile—offering understanding and opportunity to make things right.

Stories entertain—bringing delight to listeners.

Stories tell of place—reminding us of and connecting us to this land we call home.

Stories provide belonging—nurturing kinship, community, and connectedness.

As you read through the collection of stories, I encourage you to look for the teachings within each and their personal connections to your own story. This is the power of stories: they cultivate our shared humanity.

Part 4 answers the question “How have these stories changed me?”

I return to share how reclaiming stories strengthens my own sense of identity and belonging in the world.

While each voice is distinct, the storytellers are differentiated by type treatment. We include brief and limited annotation and a glossary with translations of Dakota words that are not defined in the text. As you read and connect with the storytellers and stories, you might recognize how in some ways we are all the same—and yet we are different. Perhaps you will be inspired to connect to your own family's and community's stories, because truly, we *all* have story.

PART 1. RETURNING THROUGH STORY

Utuhu Can Cistiŋna / Teresa Peterson

One summer over the Fourth of July we took a visit to one of my husband's relatives in the Peever area, over on the Lake Traverse Reservation. This was a few years back, when our boys were young, and they loved running around with their tahaŋsis. It was the home of one of his "uncles," a relative of his grandma's that I had not yet met. After sharing a meal, visiting, and watching fireworks, we got up to head back to our motel, and I proceeded to shake everyone's hands. As I was going down the line of lawn chairs, I heard the uncle ask a younger relative next to him, "Who was that? See how she is. That's because she knows who she is." By that time in my life, I had learned enough of my family's story, gained enough confidence in my own identity, and I understood: when you know yourself, no matter where you go, you belong.

I have come to understand that stories are integral in shaping our cultural identities. Damakota—I am Dakota. It is through these stories I have a better understanding of what that means, what it means to be a Dakota wiŋyaŋ—a Dakota woman. I think a part of it is knowing who you are, who you belong to, and it is that understanding that is most often gained through stories. Sure, I was raised in relationship to my mother's family at the Upper Sioux Community: my grandma, my aunties and cousins, and all my extended relatives. But it was not until later in my life that I learned of our stories of long ago, our history told through story—stories of place, and stories of relatives and their resilience and strength. Stories of my great-great-grandmother whose life and legacy brought forward a daughter, five granddaughters, and ultimately me to this place and time that has become part of my story.

I am bicultural, Dakota and German. I grew up in an old farmhouse outside of St. Cloud, on land tucked within a country neighborhood void of any other Dakota people. I was not raised in my mother's home, with the comfort of Dakota relatives constantly nearby. To the contrary, mainstream society, the white society, enveloped me. It was everywhere in my childhood—school, media, neighbors, friends, and church. Yet

I inherently knew I was “Indian” and that I was different. But what did it mean to be “Indian” or “Sioux”? Other than my mom telling me to “marry Indian,” I do not remember anyone explaining to me what that meant or sharing stories about our Dakota people or our ways.

Visiting my relatives and dancing at powwows with my cousins throughout my childhood likely contributed to some level of understanding. Maybe there was some biological knowing of place as my brother and I sat in the back seat of the car traveling south on Highway 23. *Are we there yet? When will we get there?* It would take our family less than three hours to get from the farm to my grandma and grandpa’s home on the reservation. I felt emerging butterflies of excitement when we made the turn at the stop sign that showed we were three miles from Granite Falls before taking the right turn toward the big open river valley, who revealed herself as we drove down the winding hill.

It was somehow different from visits to my other grandma’s—the German side of the family, in Gaylord. True, both places provided an extended loving family. At my grandma Meta’s home, we were greeted



Me, at Upper Sioux powwow in 1973, down by the river.

with drawings of an Indian boy and girl displayed in their front window for all to see—perhaps a message to their neighbors or those passing by that they were Indian lovers. The drawings look kitschy now, but for me, they were a symbol of belonging, showing that I was welcome and loved. Yet going to my mom’s side of the family was something special, like a place I was supposed to be. The reservation felt, ironically, free and liberating, with room to explore and be. Visits were typically during holidays, summers, or other extended times away from school. My cousins and I took turns begging my mom to let me stay beyond the usual day trip. She got irritated, but she most often gave in to our persistence.

I seemed to have a deeply rooted desire and pull to be in this place with my relatives at Pejuhutazizi. My childhood memories of fun-filled visits connect seasonal experiences to place and land. For example, in the winter, we climbed to the top of the hill where my cousins lived. Then we slid down the hill, past another aunt’s house, and finally down to the giant oaks below my grandma and grandpa’s place. We repeated this climb over and over, until we could not feel our fingers or one of us was injured. In fact, I hold scars and story to prove it. In the summer, my cousins and I rode horses up and down the deer and people trails, bringing them to the creek to quench their thirst—us girls with our feet kicked up along their manes, hoping they wouldn’t roll us into the water. Hot summer days, we swam at the creek and dared each other to swim over beneath the culvert. Hiking to the river bottom, we climbed over giant felled cottonwoods to reach the Mni Sota Wakpa, where we sunned near shallow pebbled areas and kept a lookout for snakes. We pestered their mom—my summer mother—for candy sold at the tribal government building where she worked. We played hide-and-seek and kickball with the kids on the next hill over and were among many more taking turns running around the seated circle of Duck, Duck, Gray Duck in front of the community hall. We drank from the spring on the side road past one aunt’s home to another. During powwow time, my cousins and I helped collect entrance dollars from white visitors and pointed to where the “secret” spring was. As long as we ate our egg-and-Spam sandwiches and were back by the evening, we could be feral children, exploring the hills and valleys along the Minnesota River. These liberating experiences with relatives that looked more like me than my Polish and German neighbors made me feel at home.



Grandpa and Grandma LaBatte in front of their house with my younger cousin Alise and me, about 1972.

Unlike back home on the farm, where every day was a chore day, Saturdays at my cousins' were designated as the chore day. Perhaps this was a carryover from boarding school days, when Anpetu Owan̄kayuzāza was named as floor-washing day. We washed and dried lots of laundry on the long clotheslines behind their home that overlooked the hillside. On Sundays we went to church, where I tried to make sense of the Dakota words spoken through Reverend Tang's Chinese accent and pretended to singsong along as relatives pointed to the correct pages in the *Dakota Odowaŋ*, the book of Dakota hymns. I remember hearing this "Indian" language also spoken in secret between my grandparents. It was as if they had something important to say that was not meant for us kids to know. This was my mother's own personal memory as well—that the language was relegated to her parents' generation. Thus,

my mother did not learn or speak Indian (as we said), and neither did I. At my grandma's house, I remember her good-tasting well water, her homemade bread, and the mounds of dishes us girls would have to wash after a huge family get-together. Two of my younger aunts teased and doted on us—always making us feel special—and they helped with the dishes. We always listened to them. We did not question them, and in some ways perhaps we obeyed them even more than our own parents. Now I know more about our traditional Dakota way of life, and how our intricate kinship system provided an abundance of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunties and uncles, and grandmas and grandpas beyond those that were directly born to us. For all intents and purposes, our aunts were and are additional mothers—even if we still call them auntie.

It was the same with our uncles. Uncle Super teased us as we ran past him, hoping to escape his infamous pinch. He laughed as he called my cousins the “Dum Dum sisters”—as in the suckers so popular at the time. I realized that all the teasing was a sign of endearment, because nestled within all the banter from our aunts and uncles were gestures of love and generosity. I have a lot of these *fun at my cousins'* memories. Still, it seems I cannot recall any stories that told me about being “Indian” or “Sioux.” Storytelling and stories were what adults did when they were visiting and drinking coffee. Us kids were sent outdoors and told to *shut the door, or were you born in a barn?* So many of these memories—I realize now as I write this that they are a part of my story and connect me to my Dakota identity.

In 1975, when I was seven years old, our family moved to the farm where I spent the remainder of my childhood years. My dad's dream was to build a life much like the one he had experienced at his German-immigrant grandparents' farm. So, we left the suburban life, and Dad traded his good-paying job for raising hogs, planting crops, cutting and hauling wood, and all the never-ending work on a farm. The house my dad enthusiastically purchased must have been a hundred years old. Evidence revealed the decades it carried. For one, the place had an outhouse and a partial rock basement that would house the cords of wood needed to heat the house. The other half of the basement eventually became my mother's home hair-salon business. She acquired this skill during Indian Relocation, and it provided some pay to patch the meager farm income until she went to town for a job when I was in

My parents, Bob and Joyce Luckow, stand behind me, my brother Rob, and my banana bike. We're on our farm, posing in front of the snowball bush where we often took pictures, in about 1975.



high school. In addition to the old ladies that frequented the basement, I hold images of my aunts, cousins, and me with hair wrapped in pink, blue, and yellow rollers that held the stench of permanent solution.

As transplants to the area, I presumed we were accepted. My brother and I played with the boy and girl nearly our same age from across the highway, I babysat for a few farming families, and we went to church with some fellow Lutheran neighbors. I later came to understand that there was a lot of talk early on when we moved in, which surprised me, as nothing outward was ever displayed. But then again, this is Minnesota nice, the land of conservative Christian Scandinavians, Germans, and Poles.

While our neighbors were neighborly, some peers in school were not. I am still triggered by memories of classmates who let out war whoops and called me a squaw. Teachers and the adults in my life attempted to console me, or perhaps themselves, by saying that *if I would just ignore them, it would go away*. What had taught my tormenters? Perhaps it was old John Wayne movies and TV reruns of *The Lone Ranger*, *Bonanza*, and *Gunsmoke*. One good friend—tall, skinny, blond, and blue-eyed—stood up to the superintendent's daughter who never seemed to tire of harassing me, the short, chubby brown girl. It seemed to me that

I was the only “Indian” in school, until my brother joined me in high school after attending a private Christian school. Yet, years later as I checked into a tribally owned hotel up north, I found myself staring at portraits of leaders on the lobby wall. I immediately recognized one picture as a brown, chubby, smiling classmate, yet now older. How did I not know he, too, was “Indian”? I wonder if he was called “chief” or tomahawk-chopped back when we were in school. Perhaps there were other Native kids in school, but I did not know it and they certainly did not align themselves. Who would? It brought on bullying and harassment. And the “Indians” or “Sioux” mentioned in class or in textbooks always seemed to be the “bad guys”—the ones starting trouble and wars. I shrank in my desk and did my best to become invisible.

As students we did not hear the truth, the whole story, about how our people were swindled from our homelands. I did not learn about how my grandpa’s mother and family were forced to march to Fort Snelling in 1862. I did not hear about bounties placed on my people, or about those who fled to Canada, like my grandma’s grandmother and her family. All these stories of grief and loss, resiliency and fortitude were absent from who I was as an “Indian.”

My mother said she doesn’t remember these family stories and wondered if they were only shared with her younger brother Super. However, some tales and fables remain with her, primarily the stories of Uᅇktomi—our trickster stories. These played out through her into my upbringing. When Dad left his barn clothes on the porch and streaked through the house in his white Fruit of the Looms, she reminded us to *look the other way* or we would risk getting red eyes. Years later, I can see the connection to the Uᅇktomi and the ducks story, the teaching of respecting privacy and modesty. Today, as I listen to or read the Dakota tales of our relatives, the four-legged and winged who teach us the importance of hospitality or in the raising of family, I can see now how these remnants of storytelling lived out in the dos and don’ts within and beyond my childhood.

My mother, the fifth born of nine, is the product of Indian Relocation efforts of the 1950s. Attempting to address reservation poverty through mainstream assimilation strategies, the federal government moved people from reservations to distant cities across the United States. She left Pejuhutazizi for Minneapolis, where she learned a trade: hairdressing. When she couldn’t secure work upon returning to the reservation, her mother sent her to stay with her older sister in San

Francisco. There, she met my dad, who was stationed at Naval Air Station Alameda. Fate bringing two southwest Minnesotans together. They returned to Minnesota, first to Minneapolis, then the suburbs.

I once heard one of our community leaders say that no matter how long our people are gone, they come home. And so, like many others, my mother eventually returned home, as an elder, to reconnect with family, place, and memories. Given the challenges she endured, I appreciate her efforts to do what she thought best for herself and her children. She kept me connected to my relatives and this land I now call home, giving me the desire to return to a place of seasonal memories and relatives.

After high school graduation, I chose to attend the University of Minnesota Morris, about seventy miles from Pejuhutazizi. Its campus is a former Indian boarding school. In fact, it was the same Indian boarding school that some of my grandpa's siblings attended—a story I only recently uncovered. This move to the Morris campus proved to be pivotal. I was finally among other Indians. The first friend I made was from the White Earth Nation, as was my Indian counselor, who became a reliable support, helping me to navigate campus life. I did not escape racial slurs and prejudice, but I felt more power than I had before because of those around me. And once again, a tall, skinny, blond friend defended me and my heritage against people who did not even know me. The five years I spent at the university gave me foundational experiences that helped me understand that the world was multidimensional and complex. I had a chance to step away from the fishbowl experiences of my childhood school days and to find my bicultural self.

During weekends and summer breaks, I returned to my mother's relatives and land and stayed with an aunt or at my grandma's home. Finally, upon graduation, I moved there and found a job and an "Indian" to marry, just as Mom told me to do. Jason is from one of the ten or so extended families of Pejuhutazizi and the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate (of the Lake Traverse Reservation, most often just called the Sisseton Reservation). Our life together has brought about three boys: Hunter, Tanner, and Walker.

The remainder of my professional life has been in service to Native people, as the tribe's mental health/social service worker, a post-secondary school counselor to Native students, a tribal administrator, and eventually an elected tribal leader. I've worked alongside my

people—the people that claimed me, and I, them. Despite the challenges of tribal politics and family and community trauma drama, I cannot imagine being anywhere else. I can remember my grandma telling me, “Terri, we didn’t think you’d come here to stay. We thought you were lost to the white world forever.” This place I call home connects me to a bloodline that is sown into the land. It is where my great-great-grandmother and -grandfather returned after exile, and it is here where I have continued my bloodline.

This land is Dakota homeland, and thus the language itself is baked into the trees and waters, the four-legged and even the winged who continue to return home year after year. My curiosity about and memories of the Indian language I heard as a child remained, and I eventually pursued the yearning to speak my grandmother’s first language. I remember her initial response as I expressed my desire to learn: “Oh, what do you want to learn that for? Just learn to speak good English.” I was baffled at the time, but the limited stories she later shared of her boarding school experience, pieced together with research, helped me to understand just why she said that.

Still, she became my language teacher, along with my father-in-law. Learning entailed “hanging out at grandma’s house,” visits to relatives, listening to stories, and doing everyday activities while learning common language. With my little boys always in tow—Hunter seven, Tanner four, and Walker just a year old at that time—I found and spent time with fellow language learners and activists and those tired of mainstream systems. A group of us met at kitchen tables and eventually formed Dakota Wicoħan, Dakota Way of Life—a Native nonprofit dedicated to Dakota language and lifeways.

I was thirsty to learn what should have been my birthright: how to properly introduce myself and to know Dakota prayers, songs, commands, and common language. I learned about significant sites, place names, and plant names. I learned about our Dakota history and the common collective history from Indigenous people across the globe. I practiced, spoke, and shared my language, stumbling along with mispronunciations and words out of context. My father-in-law was ever so patient and generous with his teaching and stories. He would sit at our kitchen table for hours, drinking coffee and eating rolls while explaining a particular word or the many ways to convey a thought.

My grandma welcomed our visits, too, albeit a bit less patiently.



Caske (Hunter), Hepi (Walker), and Hepaḡna (Tanner) at the Canḡsayapi wacipi, 2002.

And so, I learned to bring a tape recorder. She taught me how to make bread, preserve plum jelly, and dry waskuya while sharing her language. She called my boys Sinḡte and Taskakpa—Tail and Woodtick—as they were always right behind or attached to me. I think back on some things that now seem so amusing. Once, as Grandma became weary of pronouncing a word with gutturals for me, she said, “Gee, Terri, you’re German—this should come easy for you.” I am not sure if she thought the five pints of German blood that flow through me should inherently shape the guttural sounds required in both languages. While German was my great-grandmother Emma’s first language, it petered out just as it did in other immigrant families who eventually accepted English only. Where Kuḡḡsi lacked in patience, she made up in so many other ways—including how I was missing “connector words” and teaching

me how to write the language, as my father-in-law could not. Later, in formal language classes with an increased focus on grammar, I found myself shaking my head at how I probably sounded like a toddler—and likely still do.

I started the language pursuit believing I would be fluent one day. Today, I have come to understand that language learning is a lifelong journey. Long after my grandma and father-in-law had passed away, another fluent elder in our community was helping Dakota Wicoḥaŋ with some translations for our horse program. Reluctant at first, this first-generation speaker, one of just a handful remaining in the state, told me I needed to ask an “expert.” I laughed and said, “You’re it!” But it was through this experience that I came to understand there isn’t anyone that knows all the words to a language, and so you do the best you can—one word at a time. The precious teachings of my grandma and father-in-law fortified me as a Dakota wiŋyaŋ and ina. The language brought me so much more than the ability to speak some words. It provided me connection to the roots and stories of my relatives and a *belongingness*, no matter how the path meandered.

Some of the stories in this collection connect the dots and fill the voids and gaps of my story. Some provide insight into why things were and perhaps still are. Some stories give me a compassionate understanding of so many things. Most importantly, these stories are important to me because they tell of who I belong to. I am of the people who dig the yellow medicine and the great-great-granddaughter of Tašinasusbecawij.

and all the costume and weapons that he had taken from the warrior he had slain.

Preparations were immediately made to give the war party a warm reception. All the old people and women and children were hustled out of the camp and hid in the brush and small timber along a creek near the camp, and all the able-bodied warriors, fully armed, remained at the camp to do battle with the enemy.

Sometime later, the enemy war party arrived and a fierce battle took place, but no details of the fight were given. At any rate, the people were well warned, and there was no surprise attack.

The Bear Story

When I was a small boy, there used to be a man in our camp who was a very industrious hunter, and we small boys, and the grown people, too, thought a good deal of him and depended much upon him, as he brought a great deal of meat to camp. Come to think of it, I guess you here will recognize him in a way. He was a brother of Ogaḡadaṅ, and he was related to me, being a cousin of my mother.

As usual, one morning, he started out from camp to hunt at a lake which lay entirely surrounded by prairie. As he approached the lake, he saw a flock of ducks close to the shore and thought that he would be able to crawl up through the high grass and get a shot at them. He had a muzzle-loading gun of very large bore, possibly a ten-gauge.

As he started crawling through the grass, suddenly the ducks seemed to get excited and appeared to see something on the shore and started toward the middle of the lake. Wondering what the cause of the excitement was, he began watching the shore of the lake as he crawled and presently saw a grizzly bear waddling along the shore. The bear was too close at hand to think of running away, and so he thought to do his best and hold his own.

Lying in the grass, he drew the load of shot from the gun and put

The speaker in this story is not Grandpa Fred. He is retelling a story he heard from someone else long ago.

in a couple of large slugs and rammed them down and then lay in wait behind a bunch of tall grass. His idea was to get a close shot and try to break a bone of one of the bear's legs and cripple him very seriously. A shot through the body would have no immediate effect, and the bear could easily overtake a man and kill him, especially if he was maddened by a wound.

The bear worked leisurely along the shore, tearing up the trash that drifted in and now and then finding a lizard which he ate. Bears have eating habits something like hogs. In fact, a bear is something like a hog in build as well as in habits.

The hunter, not knowing what to do, was bound to make the best out of a tight place. He watched the bear as he threw the drift trash right and left and high above his head as he hunted for delicious morsels of food. By this time, he was about opposite to the hunter but on the edge of the water, while the hunter lay behind a bunch of tall grass, a short distance back of the water.

Suddenly, the bear's attention was attracted to something a few feet back from the water, where he seemed to find something to call his attention. Then the hunter noticed a slight hillock just back from the shore, and a skunk stood there facing the bear.

He waited anxiously to see what happened. Suddenly, the skunk threw his scent and a yellow cloud which enveloped the bear. The skunk had made a true shot. For a few seconds, no results showed, but suddenly, as the scent penetrated and took effect on the bear's eyes, he gave an awful howl and started rubbing his eyes with his paws, standing up. It might be well to say here that the scent thrown by a skunk is one of the most painful things imaginable if it reaches the eyes of either man or beast.

Now or never, while the bear was blinded by the scent of the skunk, the hunter jumped up and ran to the bear. Jamming the muzzle of the gun in the breast, he discharged it, and the bear tumbled over and rolled around some and was dead.

Possibly if it had not been for the skunk, he might not have lived to tell the story.

The bear meat made a big addition to the provisions in camp.

Mini Taŋka (Big Water) = Niobrara River and town in Nebraska

Ptaŋsinŋte (Otter Tail) = Browns Valley

Wakiŋaŋoye or Wakiŋaŋ Oye Bde (Thunder Track or Thunder Track Lake) = Some small lakes west of Lake Traverse. Nicollet's translation is correct.

Bde Witatowa (Lake with Islands) = Marsh Lake south of Appleton

Know Your People

Back in the early '70s, maybe late '60s, when they rerouted Highway 23, the construction uncovered a Šahiyena (Cheyenne) camp. Somehow the archeologists who studied the site could determine it was Šahiyena rather than Dakota. But that made sense, in that the Cheyenne were the first ones to follow the Minnesota River out of the Minnesota woodlands to the prairie west, followed by the Lakota. Good thoughts to the Šahiyena runners.

I want to determine what kind of Indian I am. I don't want Lakota or wašicuŋ to tell me what kind of Dakota I am. I am a Sisitoŋwaŋ Waŋpetoŋwaŋ Dakota. I am not Isaŋati (Santee)! Those people live in Nebraska, Flandreau, Lower Sioux, Šakpe, and Prairie Island. We Sisitoŋwaŋ Waŋpetoŋwaŋ, of course, live here at Pejuhutazizi, at Sisseton, and at Spirit Lake, and I suspect at Standing Buffalo in Canada, as he was a Sisitoŋwaŋ Waŋpetoŋwaŋ chief. This is the reason I tell my grandchildren which band they are from, not just Upper Sioux.

Maya Bdega

Back in the '50s, Dad told me about Maya Bdega, or Pelican Hill. This is some place on Bdehdakiŋaŋ, or Lake Traverse, I think on the east side of the lake. There was a camp or village of Dakota on a hill above Lake Traverse. It was buffalo-hunting time, so all the men except the elderly were out hunting the buffalo. So there were just women, children, and the elderly in camp when somebody spotted a Ĥahatoŋwaŋ (Chippewa) war party coming down the lake in canoes. Of course,



Deksi Super's pelican drum.

this caused all kinds of worry and consternation, as they did not know how to protect themselves when all the men were out hunting. A peculiar thing about this camp was that they had a pelican trained as a pet. Somebody remembered the pelican, so they put it in the tipi with a war bonnet on it and lit a fire so that its silhouette was visible from outside. The rest of the camp fled to a wooded coulee and hid. Sure enough, the Hahatonwan attacked, and seeing the tipi with a chief in it, they attacked that first. They went in and saw the pelican. Thinking that those Dakota have bigger medicine because their chief turned himself into a pelican, they fled. The pelican saved their lives, and so this hill was called Pelican Hill.

This story, “Maya Bdega,” was produced in an animated short by Pioneer Public TV and won awards. I am sure Dad would be astounded about this recognition, and I am also sure his mother would be, as that is who told him the story of Maya Bdega. See, Dad—I was listening.

NOTES ON EDITING AND ORTHOGRAPHY

A few notes to consider as you read this book:

Honoring Authenticity. We share stories as told and heard from Pejuhutazizi, yet we do not necessarily represent the whole of Pejuhutazizi, nor the Dakota Oyate, nor Native people in general. Additionally,

The stories told by Waṅbdiska—Grandpa Fred—are transcribed from the versions published by my Aunt Cerisse Ingebritson (see full citation in Notes to Sidebars). The original writings are in the possession of Walter LaBatte Jr.

Almost every story in Cerisse's book is included. We have corrected typos, regularized spellings of names, applied diacritical marks in the spellings of Dakota words and names, inserted missing words, corrected an error or two, and merged two tellings of the buffalo hunt. Some words that Grandpa Fred uses are unfamiliar or outdated (e.g., Chippeways, half-breed); we have retained them to maintain his authentic voice.

The spelling of individual names is a matter of individual preference: some people prefer having the parts of the name written as individual words, others prefer them written as one word. We have attempted to honor each individual's preference when it is known. When it is not known, we have generally spelled them as a single word.

Honoring Multiple Stories. Someone may share another story or version that differs from what is told here. This is not a contradiction but another perspective or experience. All are valid.

Honoring Place. There are multiple Dakota orthographies, and the one used in this book is the one most often used at Pejuhutazizi. It is the version used in *A Dakota-English Dictionary* created in the 1840s by the missionaries Stephen R. Riggs and Thomas Williamson. Additionally,

The Dakota alphabet includes sounds that are not found in English. For example, the Dakota letter *h* that is used in *waḥpopa* and *hantešadaŋ* is a guttural sound. The nasal *ŋ* is similar to the *n* sound in the English word *ink*. Accents typically fall on the second syllable. A video created by Dakota Wicoḥaŋ giving pronunciations of the letters in the Dakota alphabet is available at <https://tinyurl.com/DWDakotaAlphabet>.

There are multiple spellings of *pejuhuta* and *Pejuhutazizi* that differ from Riggs and Williamson's; they spell the words *peži-huta* and *Pežihutazi*.

Honoring Dakota Storytelling. This is a book of stories—not a text for learning or teaching Dakota language.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Teresa Peterson is a planner, evaluator, gardener, and writer. She is Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota and a member of the Upper Sioux Community.

Walter LaBatte Jr. is an artist who tans hides, makes drums, beads moccasins, and prepares pasdayapi. He is Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota and a member of the Upper Sioux Community.