



*Stephanie Snow is a writer and musician, who currently lives in Grinnell with her family. She is part of a group that has been nominated for several categories in the Native American Awards.*

## Cultural and Spiritual Identity

STEPHANIE SNOW

**N**ext To Me  
I made a space for you next to me  
Cleared by a shaft of light  
Reclining against our Tree Twins  
Whose limbs touch  
And grow to reach each other  
Green leaves flash messages  
The past streams into the current moment  
Soft smooth belly  
Forearms with light, fine hair  
Fingers long and elegant like those of the ancestors  
Do you see? My wounds have become exotic tattoos

Home  
Gooseberries pierced palms  
Deciduous trees walk westward  
so slowly  
feathery roots trailing  
Fingering the ground  
Grasping at dust

Shadow people operated  
in muddy floods of chemicals  
and cut my ovary in an act of genocide

Sips of roseroot tea  
Medinebisona for my throat  
Isolation for the vomiting  
Nosika for the whole of me

A pressure on my shoulders and back of my neck  
From the eyes of surrounding woods

alone.  
never alone?

Scraping thud  
As mother pushed me to the ground  
Ready to do away with me for the third time  
or was it the seventh?  
A white cloud reached down a billowy arm  
to brush away gravel embedded in hands and knees

Nokomis was my playground  
warm, sparkle-eyed jungle gym  
Brown supermodel/role model with wrinkled skin  
turned ancestor-goddess  
who visited my deathbed  
And will greet me on the other side

**M**y documented federal name is Stephanie Snow. My traditional clan name is Aditea (pronounced Ahh-shee-deh) of the Swan Clan of the Meskwaki People who reside on the only Native American Settlement in this country. My background is multi-tribal, multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual. I am an enrolled tribal member of the HoChunk Nation. I am a Meskwaki descendant and was raised with the language and customs of the Meskwaki People. I am also Lakota (commonly known as the Sioux). My great-grandfather was HoChunk, Omaha and Black (when the term “African American” didn’t exist, but the powerful interaction of cultural and spiritual identities grew between the two groups). My father’s grandmother was Dutch. French heritage exists on both sides of my family. I speak Meskwaki, Spanish, English and French—my first language being Meskwaki.

As an embodiment of diversity in human, walking, talking form, I have been aware of differences and similarities from an early age as I was practically ostracized from most communities for the way I look.

I grew up surrounded by the woods. Oak trees and cottonwoods were my playmates and companions near the Iowa River. We gathered and grew our own food. Our People’s ceremonies are synchronized with the cycles of the seasons and the position of the sun.

Although not claimed by my parents, not fully accepted into any community, (Native or otherwise) I belong to Iowa, the perfect place where the woodlands transition to prairie. It is the land from which my body was made and will return to, and to which my heart is intimately connected.

After graduation from Grinnell College in 2003 with a degree in Anthropology, I have worked in the areas of career development, academic advising, diversity, tribal cultural resources and language preservation, resource coordination and provided interpretation services as well. In one position I was able to assist individuals from over 100 countries.

I have been a member of a multicultural dance troupe out of Des Moines and a major Native American Dance troupe out of Minneapolis for several years. As a member of a local Native American song, storytelling and dance troupe, I have also had the opportunity to work with acclaimed Native American artists, performers and actors. The acoustic duo in which I am a vocalist has been nominated for several Native American Music Awards in both 2004 and 2015, the highest honor a Native American performer can receive.

I sing. I dance. I educate. I am a model not only for my two children, but I have also been someone others have sought for advice, consultation, opinion, and perspective due to my personal identity as a formally educated Native woman with traditional cultural values. 