

Working Together to Get It Right

Joan Lester



After working with Native collections at The Children's Museum for five or six years, I left the museum to continue graduate studies at Harvard. There I met and studied with Native American students. I began to understand that what the Native people felt about museums was enormous rage. The rage was about, "You who are not Native have made decisions about what to exhibit. You've made decisions about who we are, who we were and how to interpret us. You're speaking for us, and we are not represented. At all.

Then I went back to The Children's Museum and explained to Mike Spock that everything we had ever done was wrong. His reply: "Fix it."

It was the spring of 1976. Joan Lester asked to come in, thought there was something I ought to know. She was apologetic—not for what she was about to confess but that she had not shared it with me earlier.

What Joan wanted me to hear was that, with the permission of Phyl O’Connell, the head of Collections, the Native American interns had reburied the ancient Massachusetts skeleton that had been in our collection for many years. Where did they bury it? Joan didn’t know, as she had, at their request, not accompanied

INTRODUCTION

Mike Spock

them. Apparently it was somewhere on the museum grounds, wrapped in a deerskin. What would the collections inventory record say? She had figured that out: the card would acknowledge that it was in “deep storage” and no longer accessible. The bones, collected on a university dig many years before, were given to the museum before my time. The burial also played a part in my inaugural exhibit.

Our first exhibition was something of an experiment: it displaced the old glass cases with direct experiences with everyday and less familiar objects. *What’s Inside?* included a see-through telephone and toaster you could manipulate, a cut-in-half baseball, toilet, live gladioli to dissect, wildlife in a drop of pond water, and what it looked like inside your mother when you were inside her. The centerpiece was a realistic cross section of a city street that featured a manhole you could climb down, buried trolley car tracks and cobblestones, water, sewer and gas lines, an old colonial wooden water main and then a real Indian burial from our collection. *What’s Inside?* was a great success and gave us the courage to move ahead with interactive exhibitry from then on.

But, there were seeds of a deeper problem lurking within our successes. Growing up in New York, the Egyptian and Peruvian mummies on display made the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Natural History two of my favorite haunts. Inside their wrappings were real dead people. The mummies allowed me to confront death and speculate about my own mortality.

So, not too many years later, while poking around for ideas surrounding the theme of *What’s Inside?*, the Indian burial seemed just the thing to evoke and explore similar feelings among our visitors. I grew to rely on primitive, sometimes dark, memories like these as one of the sources for our sometimes unconventional ideas. Wasn’t it a lucky break that we had an authentic burial in collection storage?

On the other hand, my memory of the exchange about the reburial of the bones was emblematic of so many issues Joan and I navigated over the years. If not always quite as dramatic, each marked a turning point when Joan had come to realize that an earlier assumption we shared no longer held water, that once admitted it could not be ignored, and that if something had to be done, precedent might not be a guide to action. Joan, her collaborators and mentors in the native community, and the museum would have to invent a new and sometimes unconventional approach to bringing programs and policies into line with our goals and values, while also honoring Native American concerns.

We eventually came to understand that displaying and even having Native American remains was wrong, dead wrong. While in 1974 I might be excused as not knowing any better, in 1976 when Joan and her co-conspirators decided that the remains must be returned to the ground, ignorance was no longer an excuse. The only question was how to address the problem and what to do with the bones. There were no precedents—NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1971) was fourteen years away.

The solution Joan and her interns came up with would of course still be viewed as beyond the limits of conventional museum and scientific practice. At the very least the decision today would be made in the full light of day and formally endorsed by the director and the board. After some resistance, but with great care and good will by the stakeholders, national guidelines and procedures for the return of human remains would later be worked out. Following these policies, the decision to rebury the human remains would probably be the same (although they would now be returned to the Wampanoag nation for burial). Joan’s instincts were right, dead right, even though the rest of the world had to catch up with her and the interns.

The spine of this chapter is built around the introduction to Joan Lester’s 1998 doctoral dissertation. Joan’s narrative, amplified by illustrations and commentary by her and others, charts her thirty-five-year journey from student (she still is) to teacher (she has always been) to personal and professional enlightenment. Like the story of the covert reburial, her essay is full of revealing anecdotes, significant insights, profound decisions, and important things to remember and pass on. Deeply anchored in her values, it is pure Joan: personal, honest, open, tentative, consistent, and stubbornly persistent. From the start we see her examining assumptions, finding out what she needed to know, and discovering and admitting what she thought she knew but didn’t. You will also see that Joan never stopped there: understanding always led to action. And in action she changed herself and us and the profession—and the way we see, understand, and act among each other.



Staff member Ruth Green leads a traditional 1950s tour of the museum’s “Indian” collection.

Working Together to Get It Right

Joan Lester

Webster’s dictionary defines change as “to make radically different.” In 1973, The Children’s Museum embarked on a journey that would lead the museum’s staff—and eventually many other people—to radically change who we were and how we interacted with and interpreted the lives and cultural patrimony of Native American people. Our learning spiraled outward in ever widening circles.

It began with a few patient Native people who were willing to try to educate a pesky graduate student (myself). It spread to Mike Spock who listened to my accounting of all the mistakes we were making, and the appropriation we were engaged in and said, simply, “Fix it.” It further rippled out to the Native educators in the Wampanoag and Narragansett communities who were willing to trust us enough to become members of the museum’s Advisory Board and to work with us on a major revision of a curriculum unit. It then seeped to the Native interns who, while we were educating them, ended up educating us and then became either staff or colleagues and later to still more Native people from New England and beyond who joined in our efforts to deconstruct, rethink, and reconstruct all our programs and exhibitions. It ultimately saturated the next generation—the sons and daughters of the people who first trusted that we could change—who continue to work with the museum today.

It is important to note that although we began this endeavor earlier than most other mainstream museums, our involvement now parallels the work of other museum professionals who have made—and continue to make—the same dedicated effort to work sensitively and collaboratively with Native Americans.

So where and when did The Children’s Museum begin its journey, and how did we move towards this radical change?

Early Years at The Children’s Museum: Continuing the Salvage Paradigm

In 1963, I graduated from UCLA with an M.A. in “Primitive Art” and a major in the so-called traditional arts of Native Americans. By the time I graduated, I had been indoctrinated into the anthropological and art history paradigms that guided scholarly work at that time. These included the recognition of the outside scholar as expert; the freezing of descriptions of Native American cultures in a timeless and static “ethnographic present”; the presentation of American myths as true history; the belief that “pure Indian artifacts” had been collected and preserved by anthropologists and placed in museums to preserve the record of Native cultures (often referred to as the “salvage paradigm”); the rejection of art made for sale (tourist art) as tainted and impure; the anticipated ultimate demise of authentic Native culture, and the implicit disconnect between the Native past and the Native present.

After moving to Boston, I began work as an anthropology assistant at The Children’s Museum and continued to participate fully in these paradigms. Convinced by my schooling that Native cultures had disappeared or at best, were only remnants of what they once were, I taught only about the ethnographic present, worried about “gaps” in the collection, inappropriately purchased and handled sacred objects, and was largely unaware of the ongoing continuity of Native cultures throughout



From the 1930s to the 1960s, The Children’s Museum presented Indians as a single topic, in an “Indian room” where objects from five different culture areas were exhibited, each in a separate exhibit case. The focus was, of course, on exhibiting the museum’s objects. They were sorted by culture areas, with objects from many tribes displayed in the same case. Although there was no storyline, the exhibit implied that these cultures existed only in the past.

Left, paper and pencil games in the Indian Room; right, a museum visitor handling the collections.



At the time, I still believed in the full validity and authority of the curatorial voice, and the primary importance of focusing on and sharing objects from the museum's collections with our public (this was also before the museum understood its responsibility to conserve and preserve its collections, rather than using them for hands-on teaching). I made the unilateral decision to use objects to present past Native cultures, believing that they were simply artifacts, and not understanding that they were, in fact, the physical manifestations of spiritual beliefs.

Indian America. Like so many others trained to work in these late nineteenth century mindsets, I could not know that this Western-created view of Native cultures would, in less than two decades, begin to be rejected by the new art historians, interpretive archaeologists, post-modern anthropologists, mainstream museum professionals and most importantly, by the non-vanishing, no longer silenced voices of Native people.

An Assumption of Indian Extinction

The Indian Room

From the 1930s to the 1960s, The Children's Museum presented the Indians of the past as a single topic in an "Indian room." Objects from five different culture areas were gathered together, each in a separate exhibit case, sorted by culture areas, with objects from many tribes displayed in the same case. Although there was no storyline, the short labels were all written in the past tense, implying that these people no longer existed.

School Talks

The Indian room exhibits were interpreted by non-Native museum staff for visiting school groups. As an anthropology assistant in the late 1960s, I cheerfully taught children about the Native past, describing buffalo hunts, dry farming, the insulating properties of Eskimo igloos and clothing and so forth. Although I had seen Native people on my trips to the Northwest Coast and the Southwest, I did not connect their contemporary reality with the distant, faceless Indians I had studied in school and about whose past lives I was so intently teaching. Instead, I still accepted the myth that the real Native Americans were either gone or had been assimilated into the so-called mainstream. To reconstruct the now-vanished past, I used role-playing as a teaching tool, and objects from the museum's collections such as Kwatsi (then referred to as Kachina masks), Kwatsi clothing (kilts and sashes), Tlingit crest figures, and buffalo skulls and Lakota pipes as hands-on props. With these, I engage the children in my personally edited versions of dances, potlatches and other Native rites gleaned from

the descriptions of the nineteenth century anthropologists who had observed such rituals.

How could I have used sacred objects in personally edited re-enactments of religious ceremonies? In retrospect, I simply did not know that my actions were both appropriate and disrespectful. I thought I was presenting Native peoples in a positive light and intended that through my teaching, children would understand and appreciate

how Indian people had lived full, comfortable lives, interacting with each other and with their environment. At the time, I still believed in the full validity and authority of the curatorial voice, and the primary importance of focusing on and sharing objects from the museum's collections with our public (this was also before the museum understood its responsibility to conserve and preserve its collections, rather than using them for hands-on teaching). I made the unilateral decision to use objects to present past Native cultures, believing that they were simply artifacts, and

not understanding that they were, in fact, the physical manifestations of spiritual beliefs.

Of course, I now understand that I did not recognize contemporary Native existence, or more importantly, the critical need for Native involvement in the representation of their own culture, the essential relationship of Native people to their own objects, and the right of Native people to determine what sacred information or objects may be shared with others.

The Collection: Filling Gaps and Appropriation

In the late 1960s, I did not consider the possibility of collaboration between non-Native museum professionals and Native Americans. Fully absorbed by the salvage paradigm, I instead told myself that it was my responsibility to review the museum's Native collection of approximately 5,000 objects, and to carefully note where the "gaps" were (what objects were missing from a full representation of traditional art), and to fill them in as money and opportunities allowed. I reluctantly admit, again with the deepest embarrassment, to my own continuing participation in inappropriate appropriation



1964: Frederick Dockstader, recognized scholar of Native American art and director of the Museum of the American Indian in New York, helps Joan Lester identify objects from the Native American collection.

(collecting) of sacred objects. During a 1969 summer trip to the Southwest, at a local trading post near First Mesa, Arizona, I was given the opportunity to purchase two Hopi Kwatsi for the museum. I called Museum Director Mike Spock and argued that these two items would fill a significant gap in the collection and that I could also use them to teach about Pueblo religion. He authorized the purchase and, at the salesman's suggestion, I carried them out of the store and home in two brown paper bags.

How could I have been so unaware of Native people's feelings about their sacred beings? I simply didn't get it! Carrying the bags out of the store I saw myself as a participant in an intriguing adventure rather than a co-conspirator in such a disrespectful and appropriative act.

I realize that my comfort at the time with this act derived again from my graduate school education. Masks such as these had been presented as "art," objects of aesthetic and cultural significance that would add intrinsic value to any collection. I bought into that mindset and felt a responsibility, as *de facto* curator, to acquire these "traditional" Native objects for the collection.

But more importantly, I had never been exposed to current Native belief systems and values. As a result, I was able to treat these receptacles for sacred living entities as things that could be casually handled and manipulated by the non-initiated. I owe my changed and ongoing understanding of Hopi Kwatsi, Gagosah ("False Faces), Ahayuda (War Gods) and other sacred receptacles, in large part, to long and often disquieting conversations with Rick Hill, Tuscarora, and Oren Lyons, Onondaga. By alluding to the life and power of the sacred entities that I had previously perceived only as inanimate objects, they helped me understand the essential need to approach and treat such beings respectfully if I wished to honor the perspectives and values of Native people.

By 1980, the Hopi purchases were stored in our collections, out of sight, with other Kwatsi belongings behind a curtain, with a sign that said: "*Sacred objects; do not view; please respect Native culture and beliefs.*"

In 1999, the Hopi tribe requested the return of the Kwatsi held by the museum. With all questions resolved, in March 2006, I took the Kwatsi home. For me, it was a deeply moving act of personal and professional reconciliation and apology.

An Assumption: Algonquin Peoples Are Extinct

As part of my participation in the salvage paradigm, I also lent support to the specific assumption that Native people in New England were extinct.

Creating a Curriculum Unit: The Algonquins

In 1964, as part of a grant from the United States Department of Education to develop multimedia curriculum units (MATCH Kits—Materials and Activities for Children and Teachers), staff member Binda Reich, who had a degree in anthropology from Harvard, and



The Algonquins kit, contained artifacts from the lives of Native Americans and were used in role-playing activities with young visitors.

I created *The Algonquins* kit. Our project team also included two teachers and two practicing anthropologists. We confidently described peoples' lives in the past tense and freely made assumptions about spiritual activities. To help children interact with these long gone people, we created a broad range of activities (setting traps, trying on clothing, hafting an arrow, drilling a bead) that would help them gain a better picture of what we believed such a life might have been like. Our anthropological sources for these activities were wide ranging, incorporating cultural information from tribes as far north as the Naskapi in Canada and as near as the Narragansetts in Rhode Island; we treated all these distinct peoples as a monolith, lumping them all into a single culture area. We were again marginalizing and freezing people into an unreal and static "ethnographic present." We were again assuming that as "scholars" and teachers we had the right to speak for and serve as the sole interpreters of a culture that was not our own. Since we assumed that Native people no longer lived in New England, it never even occurred to us to try and locate past or present Native voices from this region. We wrote our own stories, without knowing that there was a rich and ongoing indigenous oral history and without even searching for earlier recorded voices.

How could we so totally leave out past Native voices and ignore the Native people actually living in New England? How could we turn such a presentation of Native lives over to "experts"? We were honestly unaware of the continuing Native culture in New England and totally dependent on the two practicing anthropologists, Jonathan Jenness and Fred Johnson, as the "experts" who would provide information and insights about a now vanished culture. It is deeply disturbing now to realize that we relied only on broad generalizations, cultural borrow-

ing and the knowledge of anthropologists to present people who actually still lived in New England.

The First Algonquin Wigwam

Mike Spock believed in interactive learning and suggested that an exhibit was needed to more fully engage visitors in a recreation of past Indian life. I chose Pueblo culture (a favorite topic in school curriculums), but indicated that since I had never been to the Southwest or seen a Pueblo, I could not create an interactive exhibit that might require the creation of a Pueblo environment.

In 1967, Mike suggested that Sing Hanson, the proposed exhibit designer, and I take trip to the Southwest. This journey, intended to create an interactive exhibit, led us in an entirely different direction. Upon our return, we announced that now that we had met and spent time with Hopi people, including Susie Youvella, Fred Kabotie and White Bear Fredericks, it no longer felt comfortable to create an exhibit that would put people like themselves on display. It felt like voyeurism, and a violation of their hospitality. Instead, I proposed that we create an Algonquin wigwam, and describe the life of people long gone. Thus, we would still provide the visitors with an interactive Indian exhibit without “exhibiting” living people (or so I thought).

That same year, we hired Don Viera, a craftsman from Plimoth Plantation to build a full-size, walk-in wigwam framework to use for school talks in the museum’s annex. It was filled with opportunities for hands-on activities and role-playing. Our goal was to engage visitors so that they would gain a better picture of what we believed such a life might have been like.

The school program exhibit was extremely popular, and the class thoroughly enjoyed sitting on the skin-covered benches, trying on clothes, grinding corn, drilling beads, hafting arrows, and role-playing rabbit hunts.



The first Algonquin wigwam built in the annex of the museum, showed how Native Americans lived...a long time ago.



Visitors to the Algonquin exhibit could try on Native clothing.

Staff even painted their faces with “genuine” Native designs. I was asked to give a paper at the American Anthropological Association. In *“Doing Things the Way the Indians Did”* (1969), I suggested that using replicas of cultural objects, rather than simply looking at authentic objects in glass cases (mute testimonies to once active lives), helped visitors to understand their meaning and to connect with the people who had created them and had now vanished.

At the risk of being repetitive, it should be obvious that the exhibit froze people in the ethnographic present, and ignored and thus silenced the indigenous histories of struggles, resistance and survival here in New England.

Of course, the exhibit also ignored contemporary Native existence. Ironically, the wigwam exhibit led to my first encounter with Native people from New England. One day in 1969, Ralph and Hazel Dana, Passamaquoddies, and Lavinia Underwood, Cherokee, from Boston Indian Council, appeared at the wigwam and asked me why I was teaching only about the past when they were still alive. To be honest, still stuck in the salvage paradigm, I didn’t believe that they were really Indian and replied, with some measure of pride, that I was “teaching anthropology!”

The Second Algonquin Wigwam

In 1968, when the museum converted an old auditorium into a new Visitor Center, the wigwam was re-configured as a public exhibit, covered now with interior and exterior mats, sleeping platforms, and fully stocked with foods, clothing, skins and supplies people needed to create a home. This enriched learning environment now offered hands-on activities for the general visitor, but continued to present the message that Native people in New England were extinct.

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A Hopi Curriculum: Acknowledging the Vitality of Hopi People

With a successful interactive wigwam exhibit in the Visitor Center, Sing and I agreed to develop a curriculum kit that would present the contemporary vitality of Hopi people. Instead of the broad generalizations and past tense of *The Algonquins*, we selected the public aspects of the Katsina ceremony to get across our message that Hopi people were still here and still actively involved in their culture. The vehicle that expressed this was a beautifully illustrated storybook, designed by Sing, that described only what we, as non-natives, had been allowed to observe at the Katsina dances. It included drawings of people preparing for and attending the ceremonies, and interacting in a more personal way with each other. The kit included hands-on objects purchased from the Hopi themselves, such as hair ties and sashes, katsina tihu (what we then referred to as dolls), bull-roarers, and piki bread, as well as objects from our own collection. We made every effort to honor the hospitality and welcome that had been shown to us on our trip to the Southwest by not knowingly violating Hopi etiquette or beliefs.

Studying at Harvard: Replacing the Salvage Paradigm

After seven years of working at the museum, I began to feel uncomfortable in my museum-acknowledged role as “Indian expert.” I thought that before I could really accept that designation, I needed more knowledge. In retrospect, I also wonder if my expanding awareness of the vitality of Pueblo culture and Pueblo people as well as the mini-confrontation at the wigwam exhibit was opening me up to new questions and the beginning of a search for new answers. In 1971, I took a leave of absence from the museum to earn a master’s degree and possibly a doctorate in anthropology at Harvard.

In her 1990 book, *Mixed Blessings*, Lucy Lippard asks, “When do people on the cultural margins stop being invisible?” For me that question defines my work at Harvard and all that has happened since. Invisibility ended in 1971 in a series of encounters with Native graduate students. After an uneventful first semester, in which I continued to work within the salvage paradigm, studying “extinct” cultures as diverse as the Maya and the Naskapi, I took the course, Social Sciences 152, *The American Indian in the Contemporary United States*, taught by Dr. Jerry Sabloff, with fourteen Native American students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education who participated as class members and section leaders!

That course was truly life-changing. I could never again be who I was, believe what I had believed or know what I thought I knew. The cause was my collision and interaction with the Native teaching assistants and finally my ongoing dialogue with Hartman Lomaiwaima,

Wayne Newell, Art Zimiga, Peter Soto and Henrietta Blueye. In her 1991 book, *Chiefly Feasts*, Aldona Jonaitis, anthropology professor and director of the University of Alaska Museum (and a non-Native woman), described this kind of metamorphosis far more eloquently when she wrote, “I have undergone a transformation of both mind and soul. Mine is not a unique story, for every person who has had the opportunity to work with a Native community returns to her own deeply touched by the experience and profoundly changed.”

“I am a Native American”

My very first memory, of many critical ones, was the first day of class when Bill Demmert, Tlingit, stood up and introduced himself, first stating his native name, and then his clan, his band, his village, and his tribe. These were followed by “I am an Alaskan and an American.” I was shocked. Here was a Harvard graduate student whose key identity was that of a Native person with kinship and roots to a particular community in a particular place. Following Demmert’s lead, the other teaching assistants introduced themselves in similar ways.

Deconstructing the Grand Narrative: Whose History is This?

The class continued to produce surprises that forced me to reassess what I thought I knew. As Sabloff presented descriptions of what had happened in American history, one or more of the Native participants would counter with a different story that often totally contradicted Sabloff’s perhaps deliberately planned Eurocentric presentation. The responses that I can still hear in my head involved a full description of Pope’s rebellion, during which this Pueblo leader effected a secret alliance of nearly all the Pueblo peoples and succeeded in routing the Spanish; the destruction to tribes and buffalo caused by the railroad moving West; and the Homestead Act (what I would now refer to the Dawes Act) that took away native lands and offered them to enterprising would-be settlers. The work of anthropologists who participated in the “salvage paradigm,” unable to see the continuity of Native cultures, was also subjected to Native condemnation.

In each class, as I was confronted by new stories that contradicted what I had learned in schools from kindergarten to college, I began to question all the history I’d been taught, slowly recognizing that the American history, which involved the conquest, oppression and betrayals of Native people, had been permanently silenced in my head. I promised myself that from then on I would attempt to also find the Native history, rather than blindly accepting the well established American myths of “the empty west,” Manifest Destiny, and Indians as savages.

Deconstructing Museum Collecting

The questioning of history was intellectually challenging, but it didn’t (yet) affect me directly nor did it

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force me to personally confront the profession I had chosen. But within that year, my own commitment to and belief in museums as educational institutions that interpret the things of the past and preserve them for the future was also turned upside down. I had brought The Children's Museum's Hopi curriculum kit to show the Native teaching assistants at Harvard and proudly spread out its contents on a table. One by one the Native attendees turned their backs to me, refusing to discuss it. Eventually, they simply walked out. As he was leaving, Hartman Lomawaima picked up a coiled Hopi basket and angrily commented, "That's my grandfather's. You have no right to own it." I was devastated, hurt by their apparent rudeness and deeply troubled by their anger. How could something as well intentioned and educational as a curriculum unit evoke such a violent reaction?

I described this disastrous meeting to Mike who agreed that we should simply deaccession and return the basket to Hartman, which we did. It was 1971 and for the museum this was the first of several pre-NAGPRA returns. It was also my first exposure to the loss and anger felt by Native people when they encounter their own cultural patrimony in Western museum collections.

What else had I or museums done to Native people to elicit such responses? If I was going to continue as a museum professional, I had to understand their rage. I dropped all my other Harvard classes in order to attend every section led by the Native teaching assistants. For my term paper topic, I chose the question with which I was now obsessed: what role, if any, had museums played in the stereotyping and misrepresentation of Native American cultures?

The American Indian: A Museum's Eye View

In addition to reading about and describing the methodology of nineteenth century museum anthropologists as they installed and interpreted Native cultures,

I visited and evaluated four anthropology museums that had major exhibitions of Indian objects. I also convinced a few more of the Native graduate students to really talk with me. Thus, I spent long hours listening to and trying to absorb their frustration with the way museums had presented—and continued to present—Native cultures. I walked through Harvard's Peabody Museum with Henrietta Blueye, Seneca, and Wayne Newell, Passamaquoddy, as they critiqued the intent and messages of the exhibits, indicating the past tense labels and the freezing of Native people in "the ethnographic present." Blueye and Newell also pointed out the painful exhibition of grave goods and sacred objects; the use of general culture areas rather than tribal affiliation; the monolithic treatment of individuals in any given group; the absence of Native history; the absence of any information that confirmed contemporary existence; and the lack of any Native involvement in the presentations.

All this interviewing, book research and onsite evaluations for my term paper led to an inevitable but deeply troubling conclusion: yes, museums had and were still directly playing a role in the misrepresentation of Native cultures. In my term paper I concluded "The museum anthropologist, like others who have presented and explained the American Indian to the general public, must accept responsibility for the invisibility of the American Indian today."

I audited the same course for two more years (a chance to solidify my thoughts and listen to new Native graduate students), but in 1972 I severed my official association with Harvard. Several incidents led to this difficult decision. When Dr. Sabloff placed my paper "The American Indian: A Museum's Eye View" in Harvard's Tozzer Library, an anthropology professor told his students not to read it. And, in my next course, Anthropology S-134: Indians and Europeans: 1620-1970, the

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In 1971, the museum returned the basket. In an accompanying note, Mike Spock wrote:

"To Whom It May Concern:

The accompanying Hopi plaque (Museum catalogue number I-NT/P 685) has been withdrawn from The Children's Museum collection and placed in the care of Hartman H. Lomawaima for return to Shipaulovi Village, Second Mesa, Arizona."

term paper assignment was to choose a Native society and “argue the case for either assimilation or ethnic separatism for the individual culture in question.” When I refused to write the paper, objecting that it was not appropriate for non-Native graduate students to make such a decision or even assume that they should be involved in the process, the anthropology professor replied, “Don’t be so silly; just write the paper.” Incidents like these made it clear that I would not, at that time, find support for my questioning of anthropology and the museum profession at Harvard.



As soon as I returned, I was able to retire the very popular face-painting activity. I now knew it was appropriative and inappropriate. We were using sacred images received in visions to paint children’s cheeks!

Reconstructing The Children’s Museum: Everything We’ve Done is Wrong

I left Harvard in 1971, returned to The Children’s Museum and announced to the director, Mike Spock, that everything we’d ever done related to the interpretation of Native cultures and the objects in our care was wrong! His simple response: “Fix it.” Spock gave me a budget, personal encouragement and sat back to watch me begin the long process of trying to deconstruct and reconstruct our approach.

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Although eliminating face painting was easy, I understood that there was a much larger task ahead of us. The Children’s Museum needed to totally revise its presentation of Native cultures. My dialogues and experiences with the Native students at Harvard gave me the courage to try and create a similar dialogue at the museum.

Native Cultures in New England Are Alive and Well

Guided by suggestions from some of the Harvard graduate students, I invited thirty Native American people from the Boston area to the museum to discuss how we, as an institution, might begin to change. It was an all but total failure. Distrust filled the room. What did we want from them? Were we just using them to get funding? Were “Indians in” and were we seeking to capitalize on this interest? It was April 1972 and this was the very first meeting of what would become an ongoing and critical part of the museum: a Native American Advisory Board.

Fortunately, better relations began to be established in 1973 when American Science and Engineering (AS

and E), an educational publishing company, offered to publish the 1964 Algonquins MATCH Kit. Since the kit represented everything I had been taught to reject (the absence of Native voices, a frozen past, no history, a culture area and monolithic approach, and no contemporary existence) I refused. I countered with a list of conditions to which Mike lent his full support. We would revise the kit if they would agree to Native voices, Native approval of all contents, paid informants (why should Native people freely offer us their knowledge, when other consultants were paid

for their expertise), money to travel to Native communities and so forth. To our great surprise and relief, AS and E accepted these conditions and our proposed budget. Now I needed to find Native people willing to work on such a project.

I had been told that there was, supposedly, an Indian community on Cape Cod. Was it possible that they were still Native? If they were, would they work with us? Teamed with Judy Battat, a staff member with a degree in anthropology, we spent much of the summer in the Native community in Mashpee, on Cape Cod, talking with and getting to know the people there. We asked questions, went to Pow Wows, hung around and even helped set up exhibits for a new tribal museum. By summer’s end, the answer to my original question was a resounding *yes*. There was, indeed, a functioning, long-standing Native community in Mashpee, another equally strong one in Aquinnah (once called Gay Head), on Martha’s Vineyard, and other smaller Wampanoag communities in the surrounding areas. And through our interest in the community and our stated desire to change how the museum presented Native people, we were able to convince seven Wampanoag people (Cynthia Akins, Helen Attaquin, Amelia Bingham, Helen Haynes, Frank James, Tall Oak and Gladys Widdiss) to come and guide us as we attempted to revise this now very outdated kit.

Rethinking Curriculum: Indians Who Met the Pilgrims

Together with our Native American Advisors we settled down to create a fully revised multimedia kit that would respectfully represent the Wampanoag people. A year later, we published *The Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, a breakthrough curriculum that connected the Native past to the Native present, dealt honestly with the full history of Pilgrim-Wampanoag relations, and considered contemporary issues such as land claims and

“Most history books about Indians have been written by non-Indians. They present a non-Indian view of history and a degrading view of the Indians in that history. If Wampanoag people had had a written language, an Indian view of that same history would have been preserved. Since it was not, we as Wampanoag descendants have participated in this kit. Our hope is that someday, history will be written in such a way that both sides of the story will be fairly represented.”

—Cynthia Atkins, Helen Attaquin, Amelia Bingham, Helen Haynes, Frank James, Tall Oak, Gladys Widdiss

sovereignty. Native narrators presented oral history, told personal stories (on tape and in text), and shared their contemporary photographs of family, community, and their homeland.

In comparing the first curriculum unit, *The Algonquins*, to this community-centered kit, I am reminded of James Clifford's 1991 essay, “Four Northwest Coast Museums,” which contrasts the grand, generalized narratives that often characterize dominant museum exhibits with the de-centered local expressions of identity and existence that are found in tribal museums. In the 1964 MATCH Kit, *The Algonquins*, cultural outsiders pieced together a general, largely anonymous narrative from a wide variety of anthropological sources. In *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, individual Wampanoags presented their local culture, and shared their feelings about their lives, intercultural relations, and contemporary politics. In comparing my involvement in the first curriculum unit, *The Algonquins*, with *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, I am struck, also, by the change in voice. In *The Algonquins*, non-Natives synthesized and presented information; in *Indians Who*, Native advisors collaborated with non-Native staff and their own words were integrated into the final presentation.

Increasing Native Representation in Museum Programs and Exhibits

Having begun to establish credibility with the Wampanoag community, we were able to continue working together, effecting changes that grew from and were often inspired by this collaboration. In the 1970s and early 1980s, there were three critical changes: a shift to increased Native presence on staff; increased exhibit presence in the form of a new Native American exhibit, *We're Still Here: Indians in Southern New England, Long Ago and Today*; and the creation and installation of Northeast Native American Study Storage.



MATCH Kit: *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, developed with Native American advisors and published by American Science and Engineering in 1973.

Native American Internship: Augmenting Native Voices and Native Presence

In spite of their relationship with The Children's Museum, the Wampanoag advisors were still outsiders. The Harvard graduate students, as well as the museum's Advisory Board, explained that if museums were really going to change, Native people needed training so they could join museum staffs or start their own museums, and have an internal impact on the museum profession. To facilitate this process, The Children's

Museum requested and received a two-year grant from the Office of Education to select and train seven Native American interns.

Although I had no management experience, I was selected, together with Judy Battat, to co-lead the internship program because from a museum perspective we had been so successful with *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*. Pulled in different directions by museum versus Native needs, I was not entirely successful as a project administrator, but I was able to share my collections, program development, and exhibition expertise with the interns. Over the two-year period, the interns (Linda Coombs, Paula Jennings, Ramona Peters, Dawn Dove, Paula Gonsales, Edith Andrew and Joyce Ellis) were able, diffidently at first and more effectively as the year progressed, to educate us. They expressed dismay over their lack of access to collections, the existence of sacred and human remains in the collection, and the wigwam exhibit that persisted in presenting past New England culture even though Native cultures had continued.

As part of their museum training, the interns developed their own exhibit in the Visitor Center. Judy and I guided the exhibit development process, but they chose their messages and means of presentation. Their first-year exhibit, which focused on Native contributions, ongoing artistic traditions, the sacredness of Mother Earth, and anxiety about her destruction provided the seeds for exhibit ideas and understandings that are still part of the museum's ethos today.

Although this initial foray into museum training

Tall Oak, Wampanoag-Piquot | Native American Advisory Board

Together with our Native American Advisory Board (I believe it was one of the first in the country) we settled down to create a fully revised multimedia curriculum unit. A year later, together with Gladys Widdiss, Helen Haynes, Helen Attaquin, Cynthia Akins, Frank James and Tall Oak (the Native advisors) we published *Indians Who Met the Pilgrims*, a breakthrough curriculum that fully incorporated Native voices (quotes as well as voices on tape), oral history and personal stories and photographs of people and places.

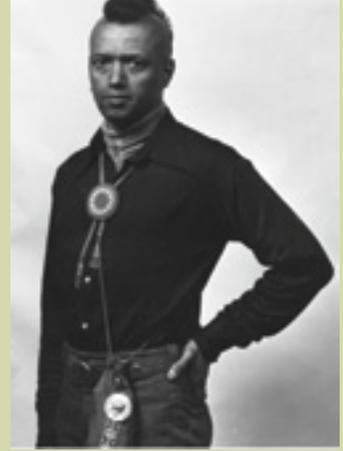
“...what stays out in my mind is that we were a functioning board. We weren’t a rubber stamp board. That’s what I enjoyed the best about traveling up there each of the times I went, because it was worth the trip. Because I knew you were really listening to what we said. Not only listening, but I knew you were going to translate everything that came out of those discussions and comments into some kind of reality. And before you implemented it and put it into the work, you were going to consult with us again. You actually used us consultants.

You didn’t just give us the title and not really use us. That was a refreshing change from the way museums had always been.

You were a pioneer, I would say.”

—Tall Oak

(above) 1970s; (below) thirty years later.



was difficult for both myself and the interns, the overall results were, in retrospect, significant. Five of the seven interns are now working in or are closely associated with tribal museums. Equally important, a first-year intern, Paulla Jennings, became the head of the Internship Program in its second year, and the museum’s first Native staff member. Since 1979, there has always been at least one Native staff member involved in the interpretation of Native cultures at the museum, including Helen Attaquin, Diosa Summers, Linda Coombs, Nancy Eldredge, Cinnamon Nolley, Carol Mills, Russell Peters, Tobias Van der Hoop and in 2006, Annawon Weeden, Tall Oak’s son.

In 1980, shortly after the internship was completed, Judy Battat left the museum to teach in public school and I was given the title of Native American Program Developer and Native American curator. Although those designations worked for the administration, I knew, in my heart, that I was, at best, a colleague and collaborator with the Native staff. When Paulla Jennings and Linda Coombs were working at the museum, we formed a strong team, jokingly referring to ourselves as the Three Sisters. I believe that we

were, to use a term introduced by Michael Ames in 1991, functioning in a complementary, bicultural relationship that honored and recognized our respective skills and backgrounds. I relied on these two strong women to critique the content of my work for mistakes and inbred Western assumptions and to collaborate with me on the direction of the Native American program. They relied on me to provide exhibit and program development expertise, interpret museum issues and run interference for our program with the administration.

A New Exhibit: We’re Still Here

In 1980, when the museum moved to the downtown Boston location, it was time to reassess the current *Wigwam* exhibit and its clearly outdated message of extinction. Supported again by Mike, we found the funds to create a new exhibit that would connect the Native past to the Native present. Although I had assumed that it was time to take down the wigwam and develop an entirely different exhibit that would more sensitively and effectively interpret the continuity of Native culture in this area, the Native American Advisory Board saw the wigwam as an important



Annawon Weeden, Tall Oak’s son, continued his father’s tradition of interpreting Native cultures at the museum.

Native American Interns



In 1970, the Grand Council of the Iroquois published a manifesto asking museums to cease the display and interpretation of their medicine masks. In 1975, Dawn Dove (left), Narragansett intern, observed that The Children's Museum held a collection of more than thirty of these masks. As part of her internship, she traveled to the Iroquois reserva-

tion at Onondaga to discuss the issue with Longhouse people. They requested that these masks no longer be accessible to the general public, even in storage. Instead, they suggested that these living entities be covered with calico and hung face to the wall, as they are in Iroquois homes (see photo on page 14).

Dawn later wrote: "History is important but we are not dead. If the study is done only of the past, people may think that the culture no longer exists."

Aquinnah Wampanoag intern, Linda Coombs, shown at right demonstrating splint basketry at a school program, reflects back on her years at the museum:

"...what I got out of it was a framework, a way to process information, to put it in the right places....I came as a Native person with certain ways of thinking or looking at things but I didn't have a framework....It

was the atmosphere and the whole platform that [Mike Spock] created that allowed people to do what they were going to do. That's what made it so special and allowed it to blossom like it did into a cultural institution. Even if something fails miserably, you learned so much from the process.

And that's invaluable knowledge to use on something else. That's exactly what it took to really learn things and to build things."



cultural symbol. Their statement "you don't have to live in a wigwam in 1980 to be Native" led to the creation of *We're Still Here: Native People in New England Long Ago and Today*, an exhibit that compared a full-size wigwam with a replica of a contemporary Native home.

The key message, as proposed by the board, and developed by the museum, was that Native people in southern New England were still here and still participating in their own Native culture, as well as that of the dominant culture. The Advisors brainstormed, made suggestions, critiqued my proposals for content and format, offered photographs and personal belongings, wrote and signed their own labels and exercised a museum-supported veto when we didn't agree. Their presence in this home (kitchen, bedroom, living room, TV) was indicated by objects relating to contemporary Native culture (a closet with regalia, dresser drawers with beaded jewelry, bookshelves with Native titles, herbs drying, posters and family photographs and a suitcase packed for a Pow Wow).

Thanking the Community: American Indian Day

Once the new exhibit opened in the Visitor Center, we wanted to find a way to thank and honor the Native American Advisory Board and all those Native people who had so generously trusted us and provided guidance for us. Since theme days for visitors were already

a part of the museum's program offerings, the idea of holding an American Indian Day fit easily into this format. The Board proposed a Pow Wow-like event with vendors, dancers and demonstrators. Vendors would not be charged for tables and all Native Americans would be admitted without charge. The day was an enormous success and more than twenty years later, it is still an anticipated event. But American Indian Day has become a community-run event rather than a museum-run event, organized always by a Native staff member with the museum simply providing a venue and funding for publicity, hospitality, a master of ceremonies, and demonstrators.

In 2000, on the 20th anniversary of American Indian Day, I was able to offer a Native style Give-Away as a personal thank you to all the Native people who had worked with me and taught me so much. As we circled in an honor dance, led by Tobias Vanderhoop, each recipient holding their gift as they danced, I realized, again, how much I owed to their trust and their guidance and how special this moment truly was.

Study-Storage:

New Approaches to Native Collections

As early as 1974, the interns as well as the advisors complained about their limited opportunities to see collections in storage, participate in their care, or easily

[American Indian Day] was an enormous success and more than twenty years later, it is still an anticipated event. But American Indian Day has become a community-run event rather than a museum-run event, organized always by a Native staff member with the museum simply providing a venue and funding for publicity, hospitality, a master of ceremonies, and demonstrators.

select objects for exhibitions. Here again was the frustration I had first been exposed to at Harvard. In non-Native institutions the curator, rather than the community, has full control and the power to decide what will be collected, how objects will be stored, which objects will be exhibited, how they will be interpreted, who will be allowed to enter the storage areas, and which objects, if any, may be touched, handled, or loaned.

What would happen, I asked Mike, if I packaged all the objects the Northeast Native American collection so that the packages could be handled but the objects still protected. He smiled and suggested that I try it out with a limited number of objects. I did, placing each object in a protective package that allowed close examination and then providing supervised access to the storage area for interns and advisors. It worked well on a small scale and in 1980, shortly after the move to the Wharf, Mike proposed that the entire Northeast Native American collection be installed behind a window wall at the rear of the *We're Still Here* exhibit. When it opened, visitors

could look through the window wall and see the entire collection; when Study Storage was staffed, primarily by Native Study-Storage curators, interested visitors could enter and have access to the objects.

Long before NAGPRA, the installation of the Northeast collection in a Study-Storage system led to questions about sacred objects and human remains in the Northeast Native American collections. Having learned about these issues at Harvard, I knew that there were, in The Children's Museum collection, entities that needed to go home and possibly human remains that needed to be reburied. Phyl O'Connell, head of the Collections department, and Mike were willing to listen and learn about these concerns, and then fully supported efforts to remedy the situation.

Respecting Sacred Objects: Covering the Medicine Masks

In 1970, the Grand Council of the Iroquois published a manifesto asking museums to cease their

Study Storage | Paula Jennings, Narragansett-Niantic



In Study Storage, a specially designed storage area, most objects were placed in protective packages or on handling bases. Visitors had real access to the objects without damaging them. They could also study the card catalogues, books, artists' interviews, photographs and other resources that provided information about the objects.

When I started as an intern with Ramona Peters and Linda [Jeffers], all three of us were quite shy. We would spend time talking to Judy Battat and Joan Lester. Everything I would say, Joan would say, "Well, how do you know that?" And I would say, "Oh, my grandmother told me." "Well, how did she know?" "Well, her grandmother told her." Then we went on to primary sources, and I said, what better primary source than my grandmothers or my parents to tell me anything. Most of what I was saying—Joan was checking out in primary sources. But we had to teach Joan how to read the same reads from a Native perspective. How to understand where we were coming from. Not to look at it with the values that she had grown up with, but to think how a Native person would see the same thing.

Museum staff began to see us more as a people who were still here. We don't live in teepees or pueblos and didn't ride on the plains on horses. Part of it was seeing the evolution, rediscovering our own past and culture that has been passed down in our families. Just because we now live in apartments or homes and do all the things mainstream society does, we're still Native people, and there's still something unique about us as a culture. Joan, Judy, Phyl O'Connor, Mike Spock, Elaine—the whole crew—earned our respect and we respected them for what they gave us.

Study Storage was emulated by a lot of other museums. The Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian has drawers with different things inside. I visited while Native people were there. One of the nicest things was watching a Native couple pull a drawer out and the woman said, "Oh, that was done by Aunt So-and-So." I just smiled and, "Yeah, that's the way it's supposed to be." Other people were gasping and saying, "Oh, isn't that wonderful! Isn't that marvelous!" And I'm saying, "We did that at The Children's Museum 20 years ago, 30 years ago. No big deal."



Paula Jennings

Study Storage had a lot of so-called "primary sources," which were available for people to study and research. But even more important, it often had a Native person in there. That's what made it so rich and unique. Because when an exhibit or a piece in the collection is shown, I could say, for example, "Well, this was done by Princess Red Wing and her brother." And I could tell a little about her. I could talk about my tribe.

display and interpretation of Haudonasaunee Gagosah (medicine masks). In 1975, Dawn Dove, Narragansett intern, expressed reservations about The Children's Museum's collection of more than thirty of these masks, currently in the Study Storage collection. For her internship project, she traveled to the Iroquois reservation at Onondaga to discuss the issue with Longhouse people. They requested that these living entities (masks) no longer be accessible to the general public, but, instead, be covered with calico and hung face to the wall, as they are in Iroquois homes.

When Study-Storage opened in 1980, the medicine masks were covered, hung in their own separate area and curtained from view. A sign, "Sacred objects. Please do not view. Please respect native culture" still hangs on the curtain. Only Longhouse people may have access to them or their documentation. Over the years, the covered masks have provoked curiosity and thus provided a wonderful opportunity to teach about the need to respect Native belief systems. I trust that the museum will, eventually, receive a repatriation request for their return.

Reburying Human Remains

The interns had also indicated that they were uncomfortable in the museum's collections because of the presence of an ancient Native American from Nahant Massachusetts. With the permission of Phyl O'Connell, and belatedly Mike, the ancestor was reburied. A return to the earth seemed both respectful and essential. It would be fifteen more years before there would be NAGPRA guidelines to officially direct such efforts.

Ongoing Traditions

Although our public programs and curriculum units now recognized the continuity of Native culture, our collections did not. In



When Study Storage opened in 1980, the medicine masks were covered, hung in their own area and curtained from view. A sign states, "Sacred objects. Please do not view. Please respect Native culture."



Passamaquoddy ashplint basketmaker Billy Altvatar (above) fashions a traditional basket handle. Potter Gladys Widdiss holds one of her pots made from Aquinnah clay (below).



1980, the Study Storage collection consisted of ancient stone tools and cultural objects collected between the 1880s and 1930s. Through visitor comments it became clear that the objects were, inappropriately, sending out the wrong message. Because there were no contemporary objects, it appeared that Native people had either vanished or been assimilated into mainstream America and were no longer involved in their own culture. During the internship, Paulla Jen-

nings had created a small exhibit that compared older collections objects with newer, similar examples from her own home. Titled *Old and New*, it presented the continuity of Native art in New England. Inspired by her work and by conversations with other Native people who told me that artists were continuing to create objects similar to those made over a century ago, I requested a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Folk Arts grant to collect and document contemporary work. NEA replied that they would be pleased to fund this proposal if I was really sure that there were Native artists still working in New England. In 1976, with the help of the Native community, the list was quickly created and the grant funded.

Collecting Contemporary Work

Over the period of one very special year, Sing Hanson and I traveled throughout New England meeting and interviewing Native artists (basket makers, carvers, bead workers), taping and photographing their process (when allowed to do so), and collecting selected work for the museum collection. As we were passed from one artist to the next, they taught us through their work that artistic traditions may evolve and change and still be viable. New materials or new forms may be introduced and old materials and forms used in a new way without negating the strong and ongoing connec-

More important, as I listened to the basket makers, I began to understand that what outsiders named and categorized as “tourist art” was simply the continuation and further evolution of a cultural tradition.

Ash splint wastebaskets and teapots revealed continuity and survival as much as any other facet of Native history. For these women, making baskets was Indian work; it guaranteed economic survival but it also allowed them to create objects that truly expressed who they were and had always been.

tion between past and present creations. For example, contemporary war clubs carved with modern tools, ash splints woven into napkin rings or sewing boxes, and quahog shells transformed into modern jewelry are all part of and connected to ongoing traditions.

Tourist Art is Native Art

Although I was able to add contemporary work and thus contemporary Native presence to the collection, my own learned preconceptions had traveled with me during the Folk Arts grant. I only collected new work that still looked like or was connected, in some way, to historic, nineteenth century examples, and most often rejected art that was clearly made only for sale, such as birchbark bird feeders or “garishly” carved and painted root clubs.

In the early 1980s, I was also able to reconsider my own prejudices about “tourist art” and begin to participate in a new paradigm that valued, rather than rejected, Native work made for sale. Instead of a single moment of recognition, this Western bias was slowly modified by interviews with contemporary artists and by conversations with Native staff members. For example, while examining basketry molds and gauges with Penobscot basket makers on Indian Island, I began to realize that for Native people basket making (was) is always part of who they are and what they do. Even when it incorporated new forms and new materials and was offered for sale, it was still theirs and still part of their ongoing story.

More important, as I listened to the basket makers, I began to understand that what outsiders named and categorized as “tourist art” was simply the continuation and further evolution of a cultural tradition. Ash splint wastebaskets and teapots revealed continuity and survival as much as any other facet of Native history. For these women, making baskets was Indian work; it guaranteed economic survival but it also allowed them to create objects that truly expressed who they were and had al-

ways been. In addition to providing a steady income in a time of cultural and economic oppression, weaving with splints allowed women to confirm and even proclaim their continuing identity as Native people.

Penobscot Root Clubs:

A Distinct and Continuing Tradition

I had consistently rejected a box filled with examples of late nineteenth century New England “war clubs,” with their alien faces and strangely carved roots. As I continued to ignore the box and its contents, Paulla Jennings chided me for failing to see the beauty and history imbedded in these carvings. When I finally stopped and truly looked at them, I understood that I had again been conditioned by my Western assumptions. They were so different from the highly valued elegant ball-headed clubs carved by the Iroquois people that they seemed to be an aberration, rather than a modification or completely different form of war club.

In fact, during the Folk Arts grant, as I collected examples of contemporary Penobscot and Passamaquoddy clubs similar to these older ones, I finally understood that they represent an entirely different tradition that has always been distinct from the ball-headed form. With new eyes, I now saw that they too expressed Native survival and were part of an ongoing and evolving tradition. The function of the clubs had changed (from weapon to art made for sale) but they were undeniably still representative of the culture and history of Penobscot and Passamaquoddy people. I hung the clubs in the Study-Storage window, added the contemporary examples and used them to discuss and demonstrate the message that Native cultures continue.

Ironically, in 2006, my understanding of and respect for these clubs as an expression of cultural continuity is still changing. Since April 1995, Stan Neptune, a Penobscot carver and I have been working on their

Root clubs are carved from the root burl, tip, and trunk of birch trees. Native faces, animals, leaves, and other symbolic patterns are carved into the clubs. No two are alike as each retains the spirit of the tree. Contemporary Penobscot carver Stan Neptune shows one of his current works.

Neptune: “The Penobscot club has been almost completely ignored in history books. In the late 19th century when anthropologists started collecting Native American objects, they perceived root clubs as just tourist items. They had no idea of the history. Being a root club carver in this contemporary world is an honor. But what’s even more fulfilling to me is to see one of my sons creating this traditional art form and knowing that it will continue for another generation.”



history and iconography. Rarely collected by museums due to the assumption that they were, after all, “impure tourist work,” we have found 600 examples so far, mostly in private collections. With some embarrassment, I must now admit that the Penobscot clubs that I once lumped together as “late 19th century tourist art” represent centuries of work. Stan and I are now able to trace their history, describe the range of images that appear, over time, on these carvings (animal beings, spirit faces and human faces) and identify the hand and the work of specific late nineteenth century artists.

Stan and I are working as partners on this research. Each of us brings our own special skills and expertise, and shares with the other. As we do, our work moves forward. There is one caveat. From my perspective this partnership is not equal. I know that the root clubs belong to the Penobscot people. If, after discussion, Stan and I still disagree on a particular interpretation, I simply accept his conclusions. He has the final word. It is his culture that is being represented.

In all of this collecting, I had, until the early 1980s, also shied away from completely new forms, such as beaded baseball caps, denim jackets edged with beads or T-shirts imprinted with Native slogans that seemed to have no Native precedent. They, too, are now part of the collection. Although, at one time, I rejected these as “breaks” with traditions, I now understand that there is no “break.” This new work, like all the work that preceded it, expresses economic survival and proclaims an ongoing Native identity.

The We’re Still Here Catalog

The Advisory Board and other Native people who were closely associated with the museum were truly pleased with Study Storage and the messages it presented, but they argued that the Folk Arts project, with all of its words and work by New England artists, needed to be formally documented. As curator, I had participated in all the interviews and decided which objects to collect for the museum. It was, they pointed out, now my responsibility to synthesize what I had learned and share it with a wider audience. NEA funded our request to create a catalog that would demonstrate the continuity of traditions in New England, and in 1987 *We’re Still Here, Art of Indian New England, The Children’s Museum Collection* was published. Rather than a book about art, this was a book about people and their ongoing connections to their culture. Filled with photographs of the artists, their



A 1986 exhibit about Katsinas at The Children’s Museum reflected understanding and sensitivity about native beliefs, gained through collaboration with Native advisors.

stories and examples of their work, it expressed both the antiquity and the contemporary vitality of Native art in New England.

A Pueblo Exhibit: We Will Not Display Sacred Objects

Motivated by the changed access to the Medicine Masks in Study-Storage, we first publicly stated that we would not display sacred objects in a 1986 exhibit about Katsinas. In consultation with four Pueblo advisors, and inspired by a

newly donated collection of katsina tihu, I developed an exhibit in which twenty katsina tihu were hung above a large diorama of a pueblo to suggest that the Katsinas were watching over and protecting the people. One of the advisors, Hartman Lomaiwaima, called just before the exhibit was to be installed and explained that he finally understood what had been bothering him about our project: the tihu associated with the sky, the chiefs of all the Katsinas and those Katsinas who represented the birds needed to be hung higher up than the tihu associated with the earth. After a brief confrontation with the exhibit designer, his request was honored.

To encourage visitors to interact with the diorama, I also exhibited examples of collections objects that appeared, in miniature, in the diorama. But the Katsina regalia and Katsina kwatsi worn by the tihu were not exhibited, even though they also were part of our collections. I wrote and signed a label explaining that as curator, I could not do so and still respect Pueblo beliefs.

Supporting Repatriation Beyond the Confines of the Museum

Our shared understandings of the critical need for native control of representation in museums was most often only expressed in exhibits and programs that reached The Children’s Museum audience. As Mike became more committed to this issue, he encouraged me to begin speaking out at the American Association of Museums, and he supported my participation both financially and intellectually. Over the years, I participated in panels that looked at the messages imbedded in Study Storage; the importance of collecting contemporary work, the critical role of Advisory Boards and the “rightness” and need for Repatriation. Perhaps the most memorable panel was “We Need Our Grandfathers Back Home,” presented at AAM in 1985. At my invitation, Oren Lyons, Firekeeper for the Onondaga Nation, flew to San Diego and spoke to a filled and hushed room about the

appropriation of the sacred Iroquois medicine masks and the essential need for their return home. Although more and more members of the museum profession were beginning to consider the question of repatriation, a well known museum director called AAM to say that I should be driven out of town for creating such a panel, and that, in protest, he would not be attending the meeting!

NAGPRA Grants

Once NAGPRA became the law of the land in 1990, the museum received three U.S. Park Service grants, all focused on supporting dialogue between Native nations and non-Native museums. With the first grant, we hired Brad Larson to video all the Native collections, creating one video for each culture area. It was our intent that people who could not travel to Boston would, in the comfort of their own homes, view all the relevant holdings. So far, one of these videos led to a significant return. After the Hopi priests requested a video and reviewed its contents, they submitted a repatriation request for four Kwatsi (the purchase of two of these was described earlier). They went home in 2006. The two other grants allowed us to create partnerships between tribal and mainstream museums in New England, with the Native and non-Native partners working for a week in each other's museums. The connections and trust created during those grants are still in place today.

The Columbus Exhibit

In 1985 when Mike left the museum to take a new position at The Field Museum in Chicago, and Phyl

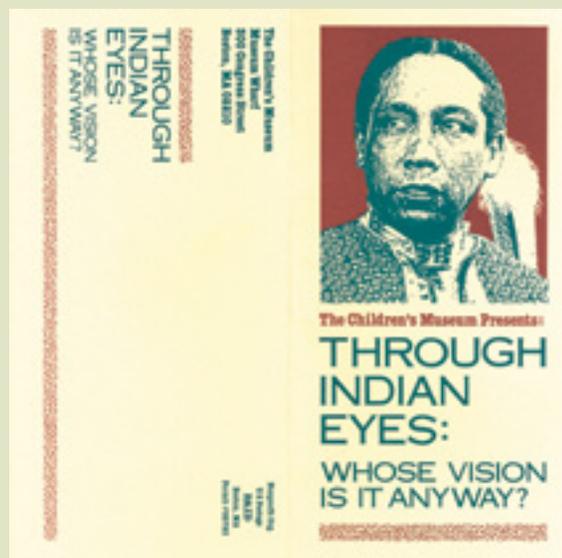
O'Connell retired, life changed. Although the program continued, its credibility and full-scale support within the institution slowly waned. There was no one left in top management who had grown with us and understood our ever evolving mission.

By 1990 the board was looking to us to respond to the hoopla about the Columbus Quincentenary. Although there was only modest support for this at the museum, a private donor stepped forward with funding, and we were able to develop extensive exhibits and programs. It was an exhilarating time with all our efforts focused on deconstructing and reconstructing the Columbus myth. Paulla developed a Pow Wow exhibit, Linda organized a major Pow Wow on the Boston Common, and the Native American Board and myself co-created an exhibit that we called *Columbus: Through Native Eyes*.

The *Through Native Eyes* exhibit represented still another significant evolution in our relationship with the Advisory Board. Two board members, Carol and Earl Mills, and their children, Mishonaquis and Cuppy, agreed to be the spokespeople for the Native community. Their faces, photographs and words appeared in every exhibit section. The exhibit was set up so that visitors could literally look through a pair of their eyes "to see" the story as they saw it and to read their words describing Columbus' treatment of Taino people, the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean islands who Columbus first encountered. In addition, I spoke in my own voice, acknowledging the need to revise the myth and then placing the issues in a broader context: Who gets to write history? Are we humans essentially cruel? Is conquest continuing today?

We were all totally unprepared for the fallout that

Learning from Disaster

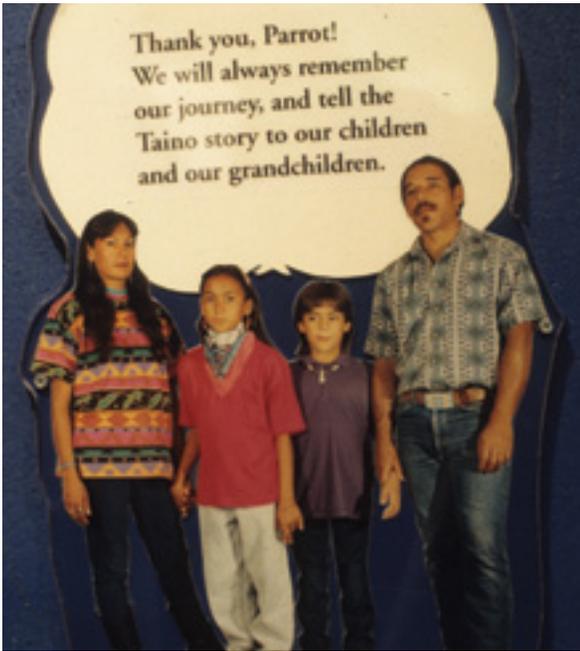


In 1987 a two-day seminar, created especially for museum professionals and entitled "Through Indian Eyes: Whose Vision Is It Anyway?" was a disaster! We presented the issues in a preachy way, not recognizing that the room was filled with thoughtful museum professionals who had a great deal to share and who were already coming up with their own responses to the issues presented.

Wanting to demonstrate how a non-native institution could work effectively with a Native Advisory Board, I had invited the entire museum board to be presenters. That too was a failure, as our board, who had worked so openly and honestly with us at the museum, became confrontational, testy and even downright ornery toward an audience of unknown museum professionals. Reactions to the seminar were mixed. Still today I meet museum people who tell me that their professional and personal lives were dramatically and forever changed by that seminar. But on occasion, I also still meet people who say "oh, you're the one who ran that awful seminar."

But for us the seminar was a major turning point..

Although Linda and I continued to team teach, we now taught very differently. Instead of pronouncements about what should not be done we laid out the issues, provided space for participants to question and even object, and encouraged participants to look at their own teaching styles and content and to think about what changes they might make.



Columbus: Through Native Eyes challenged visitors to examine many of the longstanding myths associated with the explorer's "discovery of the new world."

followed these endeavors. Everyone questioned why we had been allowed to present such a biased view. The Children's Museum Director was ready to agree to an FBI request to remove a "Free Leonard" bumper sticker from Paulla's Pow Wow exhibit. (Many Native Americans still advocate for the release of Leonard Peltier, an Anishinabe-Lakota member jailed for killing two FBI agents during a conflict on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975.) Paulla and I vociferously objected and it fell to me to write a letter explaining why a Peltier bumper sticker, present at every Pow Wow, belonged in the Pow Wow exhibit. We did not receive a reply and the bumper sticker was not removed.

The Tomah Joseph Exhibition

Immediately following the Columbus exhibit, I took a leave of absence to guest curate an NEA-funded exhibit at the Haffenreffer Museum at Brown University that would celebrate the art and the life of Passamaquoddy artist Tomah Joseph. My involvement with Tomah Joseph had begun at The Children's Museum. Over the years, as curator, I had been drawn to several birch bark containers filled with elegant line drawings of animals and humans and the signature "Tomah Joseph." But I didn't know who he was or where he was from. In 1978, as Carol Means, a

museum trustee, was touring Collections Storage, she remarked "Oh, are those by Tomah Joseph? He taught my mother to canoe while she was vacationing on Campobello!" That chance comment led me to Tomah Joseph's Passamaquoddy descendants, to descendants of the Victorian families who knew him, to library texts that mentioned him, and to multiple examples of his work in other museums and private collections. I learned that in the stressful era of the late nineteenth century, Tomah Joseph resisted assimilation and instead survived and maintained his Passamaquoddy identity by creating birch bark art for sale, entertaining the tourists with exhibition dances, telling oral histories for anthropologists, and serving as a canoe guide for wealthy Victorians, including the young Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His life and his work again exemplified the cultural and economic survival embedded in late nineteenth century tourist art.

The opening of the Tomah Joseph exhibit at Brown was another special moment in my personal and professional life. In spite of a raging snowstorm, forty-seven Passamaquoddies drove nine hours from the easternmost points in Maine to be present at the opening. And, with deep emotion, Tomah Joseph's grandson, Joe Murphy, came to the podium and opened the exhibit with the words, "Welcome home, Tomah."

I returned to The Children's Museum six months later with additional new insights from my work with a Passamaquoddy Advisory Board and the Passamaquoddy community, including the importance of asking community permission before undertaking a project that represents the community; the non-Native scholar's need to fully honor rejections of particular aspects of his/her research that are seen as offensive to the community (even if the scholar had wanted to include that information in the overall storyline); and the value of including the stories of non-Native people who interacted with the Native protagonist, in order to create a fuller, more honest intercultural history.

The Tomah Joseph story continues. Descendants of three of the Victorian families who we worked with have donated examples of his art to the museum's collection, making it the largest repository of Tomah Joseph's work.

New Sustenance for the Native American Program

Since 1997, financial and intellectual support for the Native American Program at The Children's Museum has resurfaced and the program is now based in the museum's Teacher Center under the direction of Virginia Zanger. Like Mike, Ginnie was willing to learn



Birchbark picture frame, etched with tribal histories, made by Tomah Joseph, Passamaquoddy artist.



Linda Coombs demonstrates traditional beading techniques at the museum's American Indian Day program.

about Native American issues and is now an advocate for Native American representation at the museum. Within the department, Judy Battat, who returned to work in the Native American program in 2002, now leads the work within the community and with teachers. Seminars are taught, and curriculum with Native content is developed, still guided by an active Native American Advisory Board and consultants. In these endeavors, the board serves as colleagues and primary spokespeople, defining the framework that will hold the ideas, critiquing text and often providing the exact words and images to support the proposed content.

Seminars for Teachers and Museum Professionals

Since the early 1970s, the museum's behind-the-scenes work has always included seminars for teachers. The first seminar I ever taught grew out of a conversation with Frank James, an Advisory Board member. As we picnicked alongside a river bank in Mashpee, he strongly encouraged me to begin teaching about stereotypes. I was not convinced of its urgency until I stopped at a supermarket on the way home and filled my shopping cart with food packages—corn flakes, cornstarch, butter, cupcakes, coffee, popcorn, celery—all covered with stereotyped images of “Indians”! Using these, as well as additional examples on toys, greeting cards, cartoons, advertisements, I created a one-day seminar (that is still being taught), which asks teachers to really consider these images and the messages they convey.

When I began teaching, my approach was preachy. I taught about how not to teach, focusing on single top-

ics such as Stereotypes, Unacceptable Children's Books, and Mistaken Ideas about Columbus and Thanksgiving. When Linda Coombs joined the staff, we began co-teaching the same topics. We told people what not to do, instead of allowing them to discover for themselves, as we had, what options were open to them. On a positive note, teachers were able to observe a Native and non-Native staff person working together, side by side, as colleagues and in this case, as friends.

Our presentations changed dramatically after a 1987 two-day seminar for museum professionals entitled “Through Indian Eyes, Whose Vision Is It Anyway?” The seminar was a disaster. We presented our issues in the same preachy way, not recognizing that the room was filled with thoughtful museum professionals who had a lot to share, and who were already coming up with their own responses to inappropriate exhibitions and requests for repatriation. Wanting to demonstrate how the museum worked effectively with its Advisory Board, I had invited the board to be presenters at several of the sessions. That too was a failure. The board, who trusted The Children's Museum and had worked with us so openly and honestly, become confrontational and downright ornery faced with an audience of unknown museum professionals.

This seminar was, nevertheless, a major turning point. Linda and I continued to team teach but we now taught very differently. Instead of pronouncements about what should not be done, we laid out the issues, providing space for participants to question, to object, to look at their own teaching styles and content. Native American seminars continue to be taught at the museum today based on this model. Native staff and Native consultants provide seminar leadership and multiple native perspectives. Non-Native staff serve as administrators and sometimes as co-teachers. Participants are given many opportunities to discuss the issues and consider, if they wish, ways to become agents of change in their own classrooms.

Conclusion or So What?

As I look back over these past thirty-five years, I see that the most consistent catalyst for my new perspectives has been my ongoing and often heated discussions and interactions with Native people. My learning evolved from the processing and reprocessing of ideas, feelings, and explanations that Native people presented to me. For their part, they were willing to share their frustra-

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tions and even rage about museums with me. For myself, it required a willingness to listen to their issues (as hard as that sometimes was), to re-evaluate my own assumptions and learning, to try to really change the way I worked, and very often, to rethink and revise my process again and again. Naturally, none of this could have happened at The Children's Museum without the support of Mike Spock who was willing to integrate these ideas into his own professional life, to encourage me to keep going and to keep challenging our assumptions, and always being there to lend support or ask probing questions when things got out of hand. Together, we shared the commitment to change the way The Children's Museum interacted with Native American cultures, moving from an institution that taught about and spoke for Native Americans to an institution that taught with them, honoring the essential need for Native representation and first person voices.

But what did I learn that could now be passed along to others who want to work with people from other cultures—and not just Native American cultures?

First, it has been a blessing to get to know and ultimately become friends with people from another culture. I am extremely grateful for the trust and welcome that has been extended to me by so many individuals. In order for these relationships to blossom, however, I now realize that I have had to learn how to be “present” with this community, in ways that both honor and respect their perspectives and ways of doing things. It meant not only changing how I usually interact but it also required that I process and integrate entirely new information, thoughts, and feelings. This transformation did not happen overnight; progress was often slow and bumpy. But here are some things I have learned to do, ways of being I ultimately have adopted, that have facilitated many long and productive relationships.

• REALLY LISTENING

I had to learn to listen with an open mind and an open heart. To *really* listen. Usually, I enter fully into a conversation, interrupting, stating and sharing what I know. I have had to learn to truly listen—without interrupting and without showing off or describing what I think I know about the subject. Still today, when I meet a Native person for the first time, I may be asked to listen to what I call Lecture 101, a description of all that has happened to Native people since contact. I have learned to listen quietly without saying “I know” or “yes, I’ve heard that before,” or even “yes, but...”. Eventually, as I get to know the person, he or she may ask why I didn’t say anything. My answer: I always listen for new insights or something I’ve heard before presented from still another perspective.

• HEARING AND INTEGRATING NATIVE REALITY

I had to try to really hear new ideas—ideas that

were alien to all that I had learned about Native Americans from elementary to graduate school. A few examples (out of many) of the reality I was asked to hear: Native Americans are not prehistoric people; instead they have a history that predates European contact, told and passed on orally, from generation to generation. Their culture did not begin by haphazard travel over the Bering Straits; instead, this is their homeland, where their cultures began. They did not die out or become assimilated as they faced incredible oppression on the part of the U.S. government and other citizens; instead they resisted, survived, and in many cases, are flourishing today.

• CONSTRUCTING A MORE COMPLETE, HOLISTIC HISTORY

It is one thing to hear new ideas and another to be open to and able to accept them. I have worked hard over the years to relinquish my Euro-Centric-based learning about Native Americans, and reconstruct it to include Native history and contemporary lives. This history recognizes colonialism, racism, oppression; an awareness of resistance strategies; and awe at past and current Native strength and survival against all but impossible odds.

• RECOGNISING THE POWER ASSUMED BY MAINSTREAM MUSEUMS

I was asked by Native mentors to see museums through their eyes and their hearts. They taught me that starting in the late nineteenth century, non-Native museum professionals had assumed the right to speak for and make decisions about the representation of Native cultures, essentially silencing Native voices.

I came to understand that sacred beings (what I once referred to as “artifacts”), the bones of the ancestors (what I once referred to as “skeletons”) and possessions taken from burials had all been placed on public display without tribal consent. Also, I learned to question labels that presented Native cultures only in the past tense, and to admire the resistance that was embedded in objects that integrated new forms or new materials even though museum expeditions rejected them as “tainted” and impure. Once I understood these issues, I also understood that as a museum professional I could no longer speak for or make decisions about the representation of Native people. Native voices and Native empowerment in the museum were critical for a full, respectful and accurate picture of Native peoples.

• ENTERING INTO A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP

To begin to change representation, the advice and knowledge of Native people was required. They gave it graciously and eventually trust developed between the museum and the community. Native voice became a key and essential component of the museum's Native American program. However, I have come to understand

that asking people for help is a two-way street. It creates an ongoing, long-term reciprocal relationship. If I ask Native people to share information about their lives and correct my inevitable errors, then they will expect me to also be there for them on an ongoing basis. This not only means showing up at Native gatherings, whether they be celebrations or funerals, but also lending support on key issues whenever and wherever that is needed. It means becoming an ally and sometimes a true friend.

• RELINQUISHING POWER

As the person at the museum who developed Native programs and exhibits, I held the power to create them and the immediate responsibility for their content. As our relationship with the community grew, it became obvious to me that I needed to relinquish both my authority over the content and my control over the forms of presentation. For representation to be both accurate and comfortable, Native voice needed to take precedence. This is a very difficult concept for non-Native people who believe themselves to be both “scholars” and museum professionals to truly accept and integrate into their souls. It means giving up the power that we, as

non-Natives, are used to holding and returning it to the people who should have had it in the first place. It is a dramatic and, I believe, essential reversal.

A New Way to Be

So, if we, as non-Natives, no longer hold absolute power of representation, do we still have a role to play in museums? What do we do with our content knowledge, our technical expertise and for some, the desire to continue to do research?

Teach about the Issues

For me, there are several answers. The first is to continue to share and discuss with other non-Native people some of the issues presented here. Many years ago, when I first realized that “everything we were doing was wrong,” I announced to a Native friend that I was quitting. He was visibly upset and explained that since Native people had opened their hearts to me and I had been exposed to some new understandings, I had no right to quit. Instead, I had a responsibility to pass these learnings and insights on to other non-Natives who were



Joan Lester and Joan Tavares Avant,
Wampanoag.

T H A N K Y O U

I would like to close where I began—offering deep thanks to my first mentors, who seemed to have decided that this pesky and persistent graduate student was worth trying to reach. And still more thankfulness to all the Native people since then who have been willing to share their knowledge, their frustrations and on many occasions, even their friendship with me. A long time ago, a Native friend told me to “just follow the footsteps.” I have tried and it has taken me on an incredible life-changing journey for which I will always be grateful.

Earliest Mentors

Nogeeshik Aquash, Ralph and Hazel Dana, Vine de Loria, Frank James, Rick Hill, Oren Lyons, and Tall Oak.

Harvard Graduate Students

Renee Attean, Henrietta Blueye, Dennis and Bill Demmert, John Howell, Hartman Lomaiwaima, Wayne Newell, Peter Soto, Rosita Wohrl, and Art Zimiga.

All the members of The Children’s Museum Advisory Boards

Cynthia Akins, Joan Avant, Helen Attaquin, Amelia Bingham, Linda Coombs, Maurice Foxx, Helen Haynes, Frank James, Paulla Jennings, Randy Joseph, Vernon and Mary Lopez, Carol and Earl Mills, Nanepashemet, Tall Oak, Jim Peters, Doris Seale, and Gladys Widdiss.

The Children’s Museum Interns

Edith Andrews, Linda Coombs, Dawn Dove, Joyce Ellis, Paulla Gonzalez, Paulla Jennings, and Ramona Peters

New England Artists

Billy Altvatar, Rene Attean, Josephine Bailey, Andrea Bear, Len Bayrd, Edna Becker, Marlene Black, Vernon Chrisjohn, Mary Creighton, Eunice Crowley, Darrell Moses Bridges, Joe Dana, Suzanne Fox, David Francis, John Francis, Theresa Gardner, Joe Johns, Clara Keezer, Rose Lewis, Frank Loring, Carol, Alice and Vincent Lopez, Vernon Lopez, Minnie Malonson, Joe Murphy, Ramona Peters, Stan Neptune, Leslie Ranco, Princess Red Wing, Ella Seckatau, Lola Sockbasin, Tchin, Fred Tomah, Donald Widdiss, and Gladys Widdiss.

Pueblo Artists

Delbridge Honanie, Fred Kabotie, Nora Naranjo Morse, Evelyn Ortiz, Diego Romero, Jean Sahmi, Charlene Teters, and Chris and Paul Thomas.

Museum Staff

Helen Attaquin, Linda Coombs, Nancy Eldredge, Bette Haskins, Kitty Hendricks, Paulla Jennings, Carol Mills, Cinamon Nolley, Russell Peters, Diosa Summers, Tobias Van der Hoop, and Annawon Weeden.

unaware of Native concerns. So I stayed “in,” discussing issues such as representation, holistic history, sovereignty, homeland, gaming, and stereotypes with staff, teachers, and visitors at The Children’s Museum, museum professionals at AAM, and later college students at Tufts University.

Working in Collegial Relationships

I still work on developing exhibits, curricula, and programs that represent Native Americans, but never without Native American colleagues. I am now a support person, sharing technical expertise (the how tos) and, when asked, content ideas. It is not always easy to serve in this secondary role, but it feels right.

A similar situation exists when I serve as a consultant or a board member for tribal museums. I offer ideas and support, when asked, but I always defer to Native speakers and understand that power and all decision-making resides in the hands of Native people.

I am also learning to pass requests for speaking engagements, articles and book critiques on to Native



Native American Advisory Board member Vernon Lopez.

people, rather than accepting them for myself. Although I know that I could do a good job and might even enjoy the experience, offering the names of Native people instead of my own returns power and representation to the people themselves.

Asking for Permission

I am still happily engaged in research about Native art. But my working methods have changed. I go to the community for permission to study a particular art form. If permission is granted and it serves the community as well as my own interests, then I ultimately share my notes and photos with the community. If I prepare a text for publication or an exhibit for

presentation, the work is reviewed and approved (or sometimes rejected) by a Native Advisory Board as well as any individuals that have been mentioned. Although this again means returning power to the community and may mean that research that I have painstakingly done may not be acceptable, I can no longer do this in any other way.



T H A N K Y O U

Left to right, Paulla Jennings, Dawn Dove, Joan Lester, Linda Coombs, and Judy Battat, 2005.

More Friends and Colleagues

Mary Lou Awiakta, Jesse little doe Fermino Baird, Ernestine Begay, Blue Jay, Marge Bruchac, Big Toe, Barry Dana, Harold Champlain, Sedonia Champlain, Melvin Coombs, Hartman Deetz, Jo Ann Dunn, Eleanor Dove, Evening Star, Walter Echohawk, Sly Fox, Ray Gonyea, Rayna Green, June Hendrickson, Gail Hill, Theresa Hoffman, George and Necia Hopkins, George Horse Capture, Pat Landry, Minnie Malonson, Helen Manning, Earl Mills Sr., Emma Jo Mills, John Mitchell, Arnie Neptune, James Neptune, Jennifer Neptune, Neana Neptune, Millie Noble, Ray One Bear, Kim Peters, Paula Peters, Russell Peters, Jonathan Perry, Bruce Poolaw, Trudy Lamb Richmond, Jill Schibles, Cassius Spears, Dawn Spears, Loren Spears, Robin Stahl, Gladys Tantaquidgeon, Slow Turtle, Lavinnia Underwood, Berta Welch, and Princess Winona.

Tomah Joseph Advisory Board

Martin Dana, Joe Murphy, Jo Ann Dana, Joseph Nicolas, David Francis, John Francis, and Bernie Perley.

Tufts University Students

Kristen Dorsey, April Ivy, Andrew Morrison, Natan Obed, Talia Quandelacy, and Rob Shaw.

Non-Native Allies

Judy Battat, Anne Butterfield, Ted Coe, Becky Colewell, Cheri Corey, Lauren Consolazio, Sandy Davis, Tamara Grybko, Elaine Heumann Gurian, Barbara Hail, Russell Handsman, Sing Hansen, Diane Kopec, Phyl O’Connell, Sherry Penn, Ruth Phillips, Leah Rosenmeier, Elizabeth Clark Rosenthal, Jeremy Sabloff, Siobhan Senior, Mike Spock, Betts Swanton, Marty Sullivan, Mike Volmar, and Virginia Zanger.