



LET'S JOIN HANDS

# DREAMING IN INDIAN

CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN VOICES

EDITED BY  
LISA CHARLEYBOY AND MARY BETH LEATHERDALE



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## FOREWORD

*“If your imagination isn’t working—and, of course, in oppressed people that’s the first thing that goes—you can’t imagine anything better. Once you can imagine something different, something better, then you’re on your way.”*

I said this about Indigenous youth many years ago. At that time, I and many others were struggling writers looking for “a good book to fall into.” Sadly, some of those women are gone now, before they had a chance to create their own good stories. Some of us hung in there, becoming teachers, healers, lawyers, and, myself, a writer.

The writers and artists in *Dreaming in Indian* made it home, to ourselves, to our medicines, to our beliefs, to our stories, to our art, and to our music, and we did so with extraordinary alacrity, strength, resilience, and awesome talent. We braided the art of the external to our own. We dug inside the depths of our rage until peace, love, and struggle were born. We scraped together our music, scabbled for language that would express our deepest sentiments, our strongest desires, and we expressed them.

All the works in the following pages are part of that amazing struggle to go forward, into modernity, onto the global stage, without leaving our ancient selves behind.

The pages of this book carry their ancestors with them. They carry the incredible heroism of the silent years, those years when resistance and our beliefs, our stories, were whispered in hushed tones, in curtained humble homes, in gasps, between the punitive and prohibitive power of colonialism. They carry extraordinary visuals in colors as bright as Norval Morrisseau could invent, to illuminate our very souls.

They sing out loud in verses, plain and compelling. They cry freedom in words commanding and unapologetic. They do so with tender insistence, bravery, and beauty.

Led by the great wave of writers of the new millennium, with art and music as their devoted companions, the contributors in *Dreaming in Indian* call youth to rise, to return to our fold, and to fall into this “good book.” Imagine a better world. Imagine yourself on the center stage of this continent. Let us all go forward into the future, bound to our ancient selves and as modern as any other.

**Lee Maracle (Salish and Cree Stó:lō Nation)**

*Poet, Author, Instructor in the Aboriginal Studies Department at the University of Toronto*





## WELCOME

This book stemmed from a desire to showcase the real life of Indigenous people. Not the life portrayed in mainstream media and certainly not the life of Native people as it is seen through the lens of Hollywood. We wanted to give people a fresh perspective on what it means to be Native in North America. Both of us personally know how many amazingly talented Native American youth are out there doing great work and the ways in which they are often overlooked and their voices aren't heard. We wanted to give them a chance to tell their stories, their way.

But even we were blown away by the submissions of tremendous writing, artwork, and photographs, and by the generosity with which people shared their talents. You're in for an incredible treat and we're extremely grateful for each and every act of participation to make this project happen.

As you read through the book you'll notice that along with contributors' names, we've asked them to share their nations and home reserves. Contributors decided for themselves how to define their heritage. That choice to define who you are and what the future holds for you is what this book is all about.

*Lisa and Mary Beth*  
Editors

*"There is no one Indigenous perspective ... no one Indigenous story. We are tremendously diverse peoples with tremendously diverse life experiences. We are not frozen in the past, nor are we automatically just like everybody else. That is why it is so important for everyone to share their own story. In revealing their personal truths, they help us all gain a better appreciation for the messy, awesome, fun reality of the world we live in."*

**Wab Kinew (Anishinaabe)**  
Journalist, Hip hop artist, Director of Indigenous  
Inclusion at the University of Winnipeg





To those who <sup>♥</sup>bullied me

**T**oday is Pink Shirt day at my daughter Naia's school. All the kids wore pink to send the message that bullying won't be tolerated. I'm happy that bullying has a negative social stigma these days. It wasn't like that when I was a kid growing up in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut.

But today, I would personally like to thank everyone who bullied me as a child. I used to come home





Internationally renowned Inuk throat singer **Tanya Tagaq Gillis**

with frozen phlegm in my hair from being spit on. I was scared every day at recess and after school. I would get kicked, slapped, shoved, punched, berated, and put down.

I thank all of you who tormented me for teaching me resilience and that the world is not an easy place. Later in life, I came to understand more and feel compassion for those who have a hard life and think the only solution is to take it out on others.

You also taught me to not care what everyone thought of me. Without you, my childhood bullies, I would have been bullied into stopping singing by haters. Many tried to make me feel shame for what comes from my heart.

Again, thank you, bullies, because of you I am **STRONG!**







# NDN

# Lady

Ouch  
I'm sorry, I truly am  
I didn't mean to offend  
That wasn't my plan  
It's okay, I am always a friend  
Whatever your blend

But then again  
I woke up today in pain  
I woke up hearing my NDN name  
And the woman who raised me  
She said, Baby  
It's okay to love blindly

But, Mom  
I got this thing inside me  
I don't know why, see  
I want a little me  
Just like you had a little you  
But I need an NDN too

And the kids at school  
They make fun of my long hair  
I wake up scared  
I know that I'm different

Daddy called me a wild NDN  
And I believed him  
So when I grow up  
I want my bow and arrows  
I couldn't ever imagine  
Building those Scare Crows

No, Mom  
I'm coming home  
The world is shady  
And I became NDN lazy

I think it's  
Time to wake up  
And then wake up  
In NDN places

Like it's in my blood  
I hate going through pain  
I hate finishing the day  
Feeling this way

**Martin Sensmeier**

(Tlingit and Koyukon-  
Athabascan Tribes)

NDN girl  
You are beautiful  
You pained me  
That's just my luck

And maybe just maybe  
I am crazy  
But that's okay  
It's not a game  
I'm healing the pain  
It's a beautiful life  
And I'll do it again

NDN Lady, you created me  
And NDNs made me  
So I'm loyal to my Ancestors  
I won't let the future erase me

Taking Grandmother's shame  
And looking for answers  
She married an Irishman  
And he left her alone

Like he wasn't thinking about taking her  
home  
And maybe it's because she was brown  
Or I don't know why or how  
Maybe it's because she just wouldn't fit  
Into his own hometown

So you see, Mom  
It's not about me  
My love isn't blind to the times  
I need an NDN lady  
Please come and save me  
My NDN lady

**My brother Xavier and I took my niece Tessa on a boat ride on the Attawapiskat River. Xavier was leaving the next day for school, and Tessa was staying in Attawapiskat with her mother. ■**



**This is my friend's dog, Shogun. We took him for a ride out to the bay. He wouldn't stop jumping all over me. ■**



**This photo of kids doing the round dance at the powwow reminds me of my sisters. My sisters used to hold hands when they were younger and sang this song all the time, but now I don't see kids doing that as much these days. ■**



**The Virgin Mary stands at the church that I went to with my grandparents. I'd see the Virgin Mary on my way to work at the hospital, on my breaks, and when I'd leave. My grandmother used to tell me when I was younger that Virgin Mary was also my mother and that I should always look up to her when I am lost. ■**



# Leaving Home

Saying good-bye to Attawapiskat



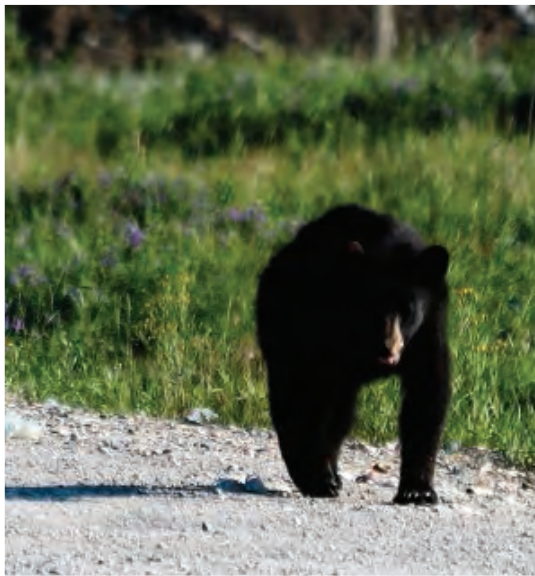
**My niece visits every day at my parents' place. I always enjoy her company. This is the last time I saw her before I left. ■**



**I was out hiking with my dog (half wolf, half German shepherd) and we met this bear. The bear didn't attack or anything. We just minded our own business and continued to walk home. ■**



**My brother Xavier and some friends and I were on a three-hour hike and we took a break to have a cigarette. We came back with a lot of mosquito bites. ■**



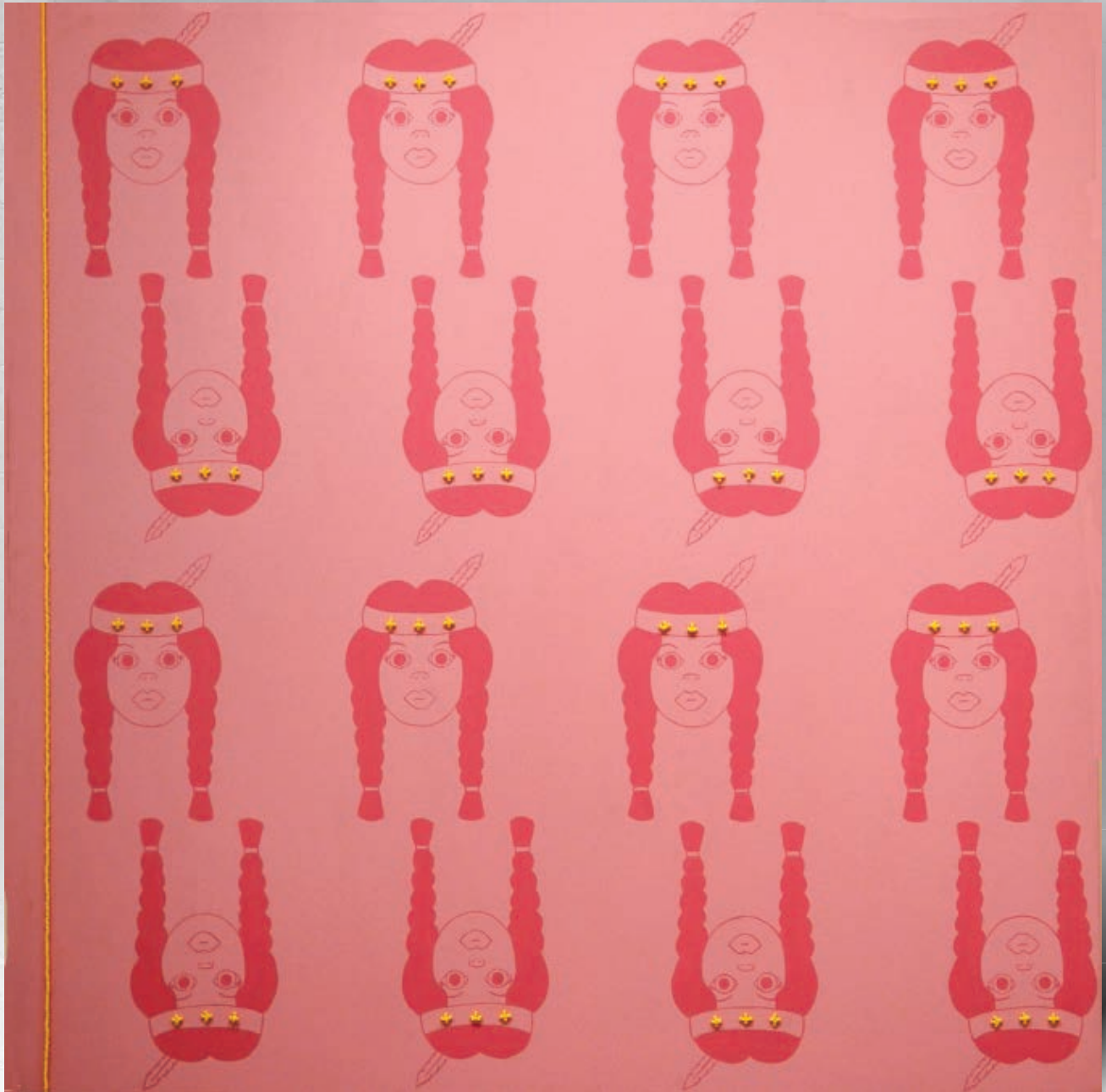
**This is the church I used to attend with my grandparents. I took the shot while my mother and I were waiting for my father and siblings to come home from his camp. I lost count of how many hours I was there with her. That was a good day with my mother. We just talked about things, how I would spend my life out of Attawapiskat, and had a few laughs here and there. ■**



**Priscella Rose (Attawapiskat First Nation)**

I left my home in Attawapiskat to go to school in Moosonee. My favorite thing about Attawapiskat is that my family lives there. All my friends live there. I also love the nature. And I love the winter season. There are a lot of activities, such as sledding, broomball, and hockey.

# GROWING UP WITH POCAHONTAS



**Indian Doll** painting by **Kelli Clifton**





## Charlotte Logan (Akwesasne Mohawk)

The Disney Pocahontas was really popular when I was in high school. That's when that movie came out. The character was made in the image of the beautiful Native actress Irene Bedard. So when someone says you look just like Pocahontas, it's not meant as an insult. But because our history is left out of any teaching of history in the U.S., it's all they know of me. When I match that image it's super exciting for them. I know they mean well, but they're pigeonholing me as a person. It's complicated. So I don't think it's an insult when people tell me I look like Pocahontas. Even Natives say it to me. Sometimes I get annoyed. But I try to take it as a compliment and understand it's coming from a place of ignorance. Any negativity associated with it is because people don't know our history.



## Alida Kinnie Starr (Mixed Blood Mohawk)

Pocahontas doesn't mean much to me, aside from when I learned that because she was fair-skinned and young she was chosen as an example of our women as a method of swaying upper-class Europeans who were afraid to make their way to America because of the so-called heathens here. Then I found her story more interesting. But when I was a little kid, I thought she was just a Disney character and not a real person.

But the stereotyping of Native women used to affect me a lot. I sometimes felt like if I didn't wear cultural signifiers like beaded earrings and bone chokers that Natives would judge me for not being "a real Indian." Often at Native events, if I am going onstage, the producers have requested that I wear "Native jewelry" and have my hair straightened to look more typically Indian. I have also seen many artists being "bronzed" before we get on camera.

I was more insecure about being mixed blood when I was in my twenties. These days, I care less about markers like that. What people think about me doesn't change who I am.



## Kelli Clifton (Tsimshian)

The first time I watched *Pocahontas*, I was in my mid-teens. Although the movie had been out for years, my parents didn't allow me to watch it as a child. Even as a teenager aware of the horrific racism in both real life and fairy tales, I couldn't help but become mesmerized with this cartoon depiction of a Native woman. She was everything that the Aboriginal woman seen on the nightly news wasn't. She could sing, she could swim, she gathered food, she was confident, the boys loved her—but most important, she had dark skin and dark hair, just like me.

Ever since I was a child, I've had a fascination with the Indian dolls you find in tourist shops. Even though these objects do not accurately represent the majority of today's First Nations peoples, both tourists and people of First Nations ancestry value them. They often appeared in my relatives' homes. My painting *Indian Doll* is a comment on the allure of these stereotypical yet charming dolls.





**TOM GREY EYES** ARTIST  
(NAVAJO NATION) CREATES  
SITE-SPECIFIC GRAFFITI  
INSTALLATIONS, VIDEO ART,  
AND PRINTS THAT CHALLENGE  
THE STEREOTYPICAL IDEAS OF  
NATIVE PEOPLES IN AMERICA.

# CULTURE CLASHES





RUN WITH THE HERD



BLUE BUFFALO



PROTECT THE SACRED  
DON'T LOOK BACK



YOUTH ELDER  
WAH WHEAT PASTE





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