

unity



Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

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Pride and
poignancy



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Never at a loss for words

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There's a word for people like Allison Hedge Coke. That word is *prolific*. And it is a fitting descriptor of a woman entrenched in the art of writing.

On her website, www.hedgecoke.com, Hedge Coke reveals that she "came of age cropping tobacco" and working in fields and factories. Over time, she has transformed into a literary craftswoman whose career highlights include authoring books, editing the works of other authors and writing poetry. In 1998, Hedge Coke won the American Book Award for "Dog Road Woman," her first collection of poems. She has hardly been resting on her laurels since then.

In 2014 alone, she's working on "Red Dust: A Mixed-Blood Dust Bowl Childhood," a film/media/literature/music project. "Twelve locations down and several Native elders interviewed," Hedge Coke says about this production in mid-2014.

Then there's "Burn," which Hedge Coke says is "a book-length poem dealing with devastation, including public and personal tragedies immersed in fires. ... Fire is both terrible and cleansing. The phoenix effect is necessary for certain forests and grasslands to be healthy. I think, perhaps, it is so in our lives as well."

Hedge Coke closes out 2014 with the publication of "Streaming" in December. "A double collection with a thematic focus in change and deeply steeped in cultural nuances," it comes with an audio CD download from her band, Rd Klā.

"In 'Streaming,' all of my influences come together in ... meditations, witnessings, engagements, leading toward the epic and eventual turn life propels us to, if we make it through the mire of our own, our historical and our surrounding experiences ..."

"With 'Effigies II' (a collection of Native poetry) due out any day now and 'Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer' (an account of her life) going paperback in January, this makes four releases this year and a great deal of production work on the film project," says Hedge Coke.



"2015 (will be) a touring and writing year for me," says Allison Hedge Coke. Photo by Shane Brown

As you read this, Hedge Coke will be at the University of Hawaii where she will teach, write and edit "Streaming." The film will be released Dec. 4 at the University of Hawaii in Manoa.

More touring, writing and recording are on Hedge Coke's schedule for 2015. "It is a very exciting time for me, for the work," she says.

Hedge Coke, who earned an AFAW in creative writing from the Institute for American Indian Arts and an MFA from Vermont College, hopes to spend a few weeks in Southern Pines, North Carolina – writing, of course.

"North Carolina is home," she explains, a component of her heritage that's "as mixed as it gets: Cherokee heritage from Western North Carolina ... Metis and Huron from Canada and some Creek blood. ... We are also Luso, Irish, Scot and French Canadian descent, with some English, and smatterings of other ethnicities. ... People have been marrying in for many, many generations. We are one result. Our Native heritage is a bit of backbone for the rest of life to lean into. The Blue Ridge is never far from the heart; right behind it, cradling."

Step 1: Invent.

Step 2: Implement.

U.S. patent number 8,240,691 represents a pivotal juncture for inventor Brad Rousseau.

His creation, the Easy Lifter, is a device that provides people with mobility impairments, and their caregivers, greater safety and ease of movement. It also makes an evacuation during an emergency easier to manage.

Rousseau earned the patent for the Easy Lifter Wheelchair Lift (<http://safesecureproducts.com>) in 2011. Then he formed Minnesota-based Safe and Secure Products to manufacture and sell the lift. Ever since, he has invested considerable time and money in his quest to bring the lift-assist system to market.

"It's been so fun and it's been so hard," says Rousseau. "(The first difficulty) we encountered was getting startup capital." Next came attorneys' fees. And "the other difficulty is finding a tribal council (with manufacturing facilities on its reservation)."

Despite these and other issues, Rousseau remains undaunted. It helps that he's a tireless networker, and that his product has an unofficial "seal of approval" from many companies and organizations that recognize its potential and value.

"We took the time to proof-test it with different transport companies and they loved it," notes Rousseau. "We also went to a couple of conventions (attended by workers' comp attorneys). They said, 'That tool is needed everywhere.' Now it's just a matter of getting with our manufacturers to see where we go." Various models have been produced and others are pending. Rousseau thinks that – sooner, rather than later – he will be able to license his invention to other companies.

A member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribe in North Dakota, Rousseau grew up on the Walhalla reservation in that state. His mother, Christine Rousseau, was the catalyst for his foray into a period

Brad Rousseau's product has an unofficial "seal of approval" from many companies and organizations that recognize its potential and value.



Brad Rousseau is the inventor of the Easy Lifter Wheelchair Lift. Photo by Barb Rousseau

of his life that now revolves around inventions, patents and entrepreneurship.

"When (his mom) was a nurse ... she would transport people," Rousseau explains. "She had a lot of insight into (the difficulties of executing) evacuation plans. (Because of that) she convinced me to go get a patent."

Eventually, Rousseau's mother developed diabetes, leukemia and kidney failure. Like many patients whom she once attended to, she relied on a wheelchair for mobility.

"That tool allowed her to live at home until she died," says Rousseau. "That tool allowed us to take her to doctors' appointments ... that tool will do that for other families."

As noted on Safe and Secure Products' website, "Before it was the buildings, churches, apartments and everywhere else, had to be wheelchair accessible. We set out to make all wheelchairs building accessible."

Any device that plays such an integral part in the lives of patients must be durable and safe. Rousseau says he is poised to bring just such a product to the marketplace.

"I want people to know that we have quality products and services. (The Easy Lifter Wheelchair Lift) is a value buy and not something that's going to be disposable. It'll last for up to 30 years, we believe. I know someday it will save lives."

Pride and poignancy



For more information on our cultural fine art collection, visit www.picture-that.com.
Picture That, LLC

The artists featured in this issue of *Unity* magazine draw upon ancestral inspirations and personal connections that create an environment of individuality, intimacy and passion.



"Eagle of Hope" by Lance Singer

LANCE SINGER

Lance Singer was introduced to art when his first grade teacher was setting up art supplies for his class. Singer was awed by the opening of paint containers, demonstration of using a paintbrush, and the colors of yellow and green. After seeing a professional artist's work of nature, animals and waterfalls, Singer's artistic aspirations were sealed.

Most of Singer's art contains the elements of spirits, legends and practices of his Woodland Cree culture. He maintains that the elders who teach old customs continue to inspire his work. The stark contrast of red orange, white and black in "Healing Wind" represents Singer's grandmother, a "spirit woman whose voice is the wind that heals a troubled, painful soul; her power is a life giver and her touch is sacred," says Singer.

"Goyalé," (Goya-lay), featured on the cover of *Unity*, represents the heartbreak Goyalé (aka Geronimo) felt as he and his people fought to defend their homeland. His grim, creviced face looks almost like a 3-D image against the batik-like backdrop of red-violet.



"Healing Wind" by Lance Singer



"Lone Wolf" by Lance Singer

Clean wisps and background shadows of blue highlight the "Lone Wolf" that, Singer says, "endlessly travels and hunts solo until he finds his mate." The white circle in "Eagle of Hope" symbolizes just that – hope. Singer says this piece conveys the idea that the eagle realizes people's gifts and gives hope to overcome obstacles put before them.

Singer is known for his attention to detail in his paintings, carvings, powwow regalia, and rock and arrowhead paintings. "Learning about oneself from within" is the message he wants to impart through his work.



"DT Fleming Beach" by Jordanne Weinstein

JORDANNE WEINSTEIN

Mostly self-taught, Jordanne Weinstein decided to follow her dream to become a full-time artist in 2002 with the help of supportive mentors along the way. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design from The College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York, and interned with the creator of the I Love NY logo. Weinstein brings a sense of uniqueness through her medium choices of oil, acrylic with gold leaf and watercolors. She paints her personal moments and experiences of the Hawaiian Islands while giving viewers a way to connect with their very own memories.

Weinstein works in plein-air (painting outside) and is known for her broad-brush renditions of seascapes and landscapes. She says her paintings are symbolic of inspiration, passion and spontaneity as the wind shifts and the sun sets. "DT Fleming Beach" is Weinstein's interpretation of a local beach in West Maui named America's best beach in 2006. It was her desire to portray the essence of the beach with an emphasis on color, brushstroke, texture and contrast.



"Maui Memory" by Jordanne Weinstein

In "Hawaiian Palm," the use of a Gessoboard panel, a smooth-surface board, allows the brushstrokes to create a more contemporary look of the palm tree, a traditional Hawaiian subject. "Maui Memory" portrays the soft and serene quality of a quintessential beach in Spreckelsville, Hawaii. Weinstein's rendition represents its red dirt, billowing clouds with hints of soft yellow, and blue-green ocean in one panoramic view.

"Aloha connects love and respect of the land to all of Hawaii's people," says Weinstein. "Aloha and my spirituality inspires my artistic development and brings peace and harmony into my work."



"Hawaiian Palm" by Jordanne Weinstein

DEBORAH MCDUFF

As an only child, art became Deborah McDuff's friend. In her solitude, it was a path to her self-expression. McDuff fondly recalls always being asked to do artistic projects in school and being inspired and supported by her artistic grandmother and poetic grandfather. Now, she uses her art to make social statements and tell stories of the sometimes voiceless.

McDuff says her work celebrates the bereaved and loved ones lost. Many conceptual ideas, images and words are revealed in her dreams, then created when she is awake. One such word from her dreams, Teshcana, (Tesh kah na) is defined as "where the babies go" when they pass away. Her work, "Hanson Teshcana," is a tribute to her son, who was born without kidneys. The linen shroud with a cotton



"Ceremonial Costume" by Deborah McDuff



"SandyHook Teshcana" by Deborah McDuff

bottom is adorned with mixed-media materials of beads, velvet, raffia and yarn with hand-painted sticks on both sides. Two "perfect" kidneys painted blue appear on the frontal blue and white striped bib.

"SandyHook Teshcana" pays homage to the children of Newtown, Connecticut, site of a 2013 school shooting massacre. The roadside memorial is painted in the middle and surrounded by natural materials, and "the yarn represents love," says McDuff.

"Ceremonial Costume" is worn by the "Spirit Angel, who watches over the Teshcana babies," explains McDuff. The costume is decorated with cowry beads and symbols of mixed media on the front and back, and made of various types of yellow and beige raffia to give it movement.

"From my dreams and words, roadside memorials and other works are produced as a testimony and to aid one's awareness of social issues ..." says McDuff. It is her objective to foster a spirit of celebration and healing, and create social change through her work.



"Hanson Teshcana" by Deborah McDuff

Health food products raise the bar



Karlene Hunter is CEO of Native American Natural Foods. Photos courtesy of Tanka/Native American Natural Foods

Your favorite energy bar might be organic. It might even be certified as gluten-free. But if you're looking for an organic, gluten-free energy bar with something extra – say, buffalo meat – a food maker based on a reservation in South Dakota has a niche product that could be to your liking.

The buffalo-based food products known as Tanka (which means “large” or “great” in the Lakota language) include the signature Tanka Bar, Tanka Bites and Tanka Sticks. Its newest product, Tanka Gourmet Buffalo Jerky, debuted in spring 2014.

Mark Tilsen is president and co-founder of Native American Natural Foods, which created the Tanka product line. He says the company ended 2013 with slightly less than \$2 million in sales.

“The company’s growing real fast,” says Tilsen, who attributes the sales increase to new packaging, greater customer awareness and “consumers who are looking for snacks that don’t have empty calories. We’re very much on trend with the health-conscious consumer.” Tanka products are sold on the company’s website, www.tankabar.com, and more than 6,000 locations nationwide including REI and Whole Foods.

Tilsen’s longtime business partner, Karlene Hunter is a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and CEO and co-founder of Native American Natural Foods. Their company, located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (home of the Oglala Lakota Nation), does more than make specialty products. It’s at the heart of a campaign to increase the number of buffalo on the Great Plains, where millions once roamed. Now, reportedly, there are 250,000 to 300,000 of them. Increasing their numbers benefits people as well as the Plains, Tilsen says.

“It’s important to come up with ways to invest in buffalo so we can keep it a healthy protein. It’s a very sustainable animal. This is part of America’s prairie that’s never seen a plow. So when you restore the buffalo, you restore the prairie.

“We’re saying that returning the buffalo to the land can help restore health to the land and the people and help to build a sustainable economy.”

In partnership with the Indian Lands Tenure Foundation, Native American Natural Foods created the Tanka Fund (<http://tankafund.org>) to help return the buffalo to the Plains. September has been designated as Tanka Returns Month, the beginning of an annual fund-raising campaign. Along with donations from the public, Tanka is reaching out to its retailers for contributions to the fund.

Along with investing in the future of the buffalo, Native American Natural Foods invests in the Lakota people by providing jobs through production of its Tanka products – made possible by the burgeoning increase in sales and customer awareness.

“When you make these products part of your life, you’re also creating opportunity for young people who’ve never had an opportunity (for a full-time job),” says Tilsen.

“We look at this as a gift that we give to our customers and it comes back in terms of opportunity for the Lakota people and restoration of the buffalo to the prairie.”



Evolution of a culinary oracle

Chef Freddie Bitsoie believes Native American food is on the cusp of culinary stardom.

"Many people are surprised that indigenous food and indigenous culture are still not deemed as a category of food." Despite, that, "I see Native American cuisine within the next 10 years to be rising in eateries and on television, not just in this country but globally," says the omnipresent culinary entrepreneur and educator.

As the owner of FJBits, a Native American foods firm, and as a highly sought-after speaker, Bitsoie is certainly doing his part to raise the profile of Native cuisine. He's a constant traveler, making presentations for organizations and companies such as Kraft Foods, The College of Holy Cross, Yale University and the Heard Museum in Phoenix.

He's also working on another Native-foods endeavor: a TV show called "Rezervations Not Required." Several episodes have been shot, but in mid-2014 the show was still in "the introduction category."

"We're still trying to fund future locations so we can finish the season. Once the entire season is made, it'll be more sellable," Bitsoie says. He hopes 13 episodes of "Rezervations Not Required" (www.freddiebitsoie.com/rnr) will debut in 2015. The National Geographic Channel and the Smithsonian Channel have been approached about airing the show.

"I (plan to) bring the viewer along as an outsider to learn along with me ... allowing the viewer to experience the culture vicariously ..." says Bitsoie.

"Rezervations Not Required" will provide the perfect avenue for Bitsoie to further his mission as an educator and proponent of Native food.



"I love what I do," says Chef Freddie Bitsoie. "I'm a chef who's blessed to travel."



Chef Freddie Bitsoie. Photos courtesy of FJBits

"I need to make Native food more accessible," he says. "I need to talk about Native food on a regional level. ..."

"Most people who teach about Native food will encourage people to cook the old way. There's nothing wrong with that ... but what I do is make it more accessible by using an oven in the house (present)" as opposed to "digging a big hole" to cook (past).

Bitsoie, a member of the Navajo tribe, was born in Monticello, Utah. In his formative years, he was captivated by people – not food. Or so it seemed.

"I grew up and lived and experienced every town west of Albuquerque all the way to California. So I experienced different cultures, just different people. Cultures along Interstate 40 have such different people."

Bitsoie entered the University of New Mexico without knowing which career he would pursue. That changed when he enrolled in an anthropology class.

"I thought it was great," he recalls. "I caught on to the lectures. I understood the theories of anthropology. I really enjoyed every moment of it."

Bitsoie's instructor pointed out that all the papers he submitted "had to do with food," and encouraged him to pursue a career in culinary arts. Later, "with a semester left of my college life," says Bitsoie, "I jumped ship and went to Scottsdale Culinary Institute."

Now the Gallup, New Mexico resident couldn't be happier.

"I'm a chef who's blessed to travel," Bitsoie says, and "I love what I do."

See Chef Freddie Bitsoie's recipe on page 8.

Southwest Corn Chowder



Courtesy of Chef Freddie Bitsoie

- 5 fresh corn or 1/2 pound frozen, kernels removed
- 1 small onion, small diced
- 3 russet potatoes, small diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Parsley, chopped
- 2 bacon strips, diced
- 4 ounces heavy cream
- Pepper
- Salt
- Fresh thyme
- Bay leaf
- 1 red bell pepper, small diced
- 1 hatch green chili, small diced
- 32 ounces chicken stock or vegetable stock



Place bacon in pot and render fat. Sweat onion, red pepper and green chili in bacon for 30 minutes slowly; do not burn.

Add corn and garlic to pot and sweat for about 10 minutes.

Add stock and bring to a boil, then add potatoes; they should cook in 10 to 15 minutes.

Remove thyme and bay leaf, then take 1/3 and place in a blender (try to get as much potato but not all). Puree until smooth and the starch of the potatoes thicken the puree. Combine back into the soup.

Add cream only to smooth out the color of the soup.

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