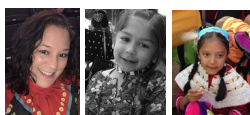




CELEBRATING NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



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NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

November is National Native American Heritage Month. It is a time to celebrate and acknowledge the rich and diverse cultures, traditions, and important contributions of the Native people. This month provides a time to honor the heritage of these remarkable Americans who deeply enrich the quality and character of our Nation. The Oregon Administrator Scholars Program is proud to recognize some of our scholarship recipients in this edition of the newsletter.

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS:

MARQUITA GUZMAN

I am an enrolled member of the Shoshone-Bannock tribes of Fort Hall, Idaho. I'm also Mexican-American on my father's side. My Native American culture has always played an important role in my life. Despite being an "Urban Indian" I grew up dancing, learning to bead, gathering and preserving foods and visiting family in Fort Hall. As a parent I am working to give these same experiences to my two children.

When I was a practicing school counselor, I was committed to helping students develop a positive racial identity and connection to their cultural heritage. A positive identity and sense of self is a protective factor for students and especially for our black and brown students. Now as an educational leader I hope to find ways to help other educators see the importance of affirming students' racial identity in the school setting each and every day.

Favorite Quote: "We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors we borrow it from our children"

MARCELLA SIX

I am awed by the teachings that are continually passed on from my dad and my tribe- the teachings of responsibility and generosity that I want to bring to my school and district. It is these teachings that are really what will shape the future of our students in such a way as to impact them to influence the wider communities around them in a positive way. When I think about my life experiences that most shape the person that I am, I would say the biggest driver would be my strong work ethic. This work ethic, I believe, comes from my Native Heritage. Although it is hard to define what my "Native" upbringing was like because it just was simply, my upbringing, I can identify a couple of characteristics that I believe are solely tribal, and I will discuss those. I grew up in a multigenerational family home, my grandmother lived with us. I often remember my grandmother saying many times growing up, "You know, when I was a girl, if you didn't work, you didn't eat." She was of course telling me this to encourage me to work harder, have responsibility, and contribute to the family because we cannot afford to be lazy. We worked for everything we did and everything we had. We picked our own tea leaves, we picked berries and made jam, we hunted, fished, and then put up the meat. We did this all as a family to benefit us and the wider community of elders. This instilled in me a great responsibility, generosity, and a drive to work hard for what I have and what I want to accomplish.

Of the family and tribal members that instilled in me a very strong work ethic, my dad was the largest influence. In our tribe, the father figure is the patriarch and my dad lived up to this role. My dad insisted on honesty, integrity, and generosity above all things. He gave freely to those in his family and to wider tribal members. I always thought these characteristics were traits my dad specifically had, until my dad's Last Boat Ride where I saw the tribe come together and give generously on a much deeper level. In our tribe when someone passes, they are taken on their Last Boat Ride upriver. We didn't have enough seating for everyone to go with my dad. The tribe came together in an incredible way- people we didn't even know came to drive us, so no one was left behind for this significant ceremonial practice. This instance impacted me significantly because my tribal members didn't ask any questions at all, nor did they hesitate. They saw a need and they had the means to fill that need, no questions asked. These are the same practices that need to be in the classroom. It is these practices that can truly make a difference and change the world for the better.

GILLIAN MURR

Last school year one of my students told our AP that our school was the best she had ever been to because she finally had a teacher who looked like her. To many, this may not seem like a big deal, but to this student, an Indigenous young person, this was huge. This year, I had three Indigenous students wear regalia to school during "Rock Your Mocs" week, a national week of Indigenous pride. I wore my moccasins, too. Representation matters. When our young Indigenous, Black, and brown youth see themselves in the books they read, the media they consume, and the positions of leadership around them, they are more likely to believe they can also reach those positions. A 2018 Pew Research report notes that only 20 percent of educators across the country come from minority backgrounds. (<https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/why-representation-matters-in-low-performing-schools>). This is a problem. If they aren't seeing people they relate to, they are more likely to have lower ambitions for themselves. Additionally, in a survey of 4,035 titles published in 2019, 11.7% were about Black communities, 8.8% were about Asian communities, 5.9% about Latinx communities, and only 1.6% were about Indigenous communities (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020). Students of color need to see themselves in the books they read and white students need to read about experiences outside their dominant culture. This is not happening.

As I continue my role as an educator, and current administrator intern, it's important for me to keep it real and let my students know where I come from, not just as an Indigenous woman who spent years growing up on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, but as a woman who grew up in poverty to parents with addictions, family in prison, and being a teen mom. My stories are not a myth about mediocrity and pulling myself up by my bootstraps but pushing against a system that was designed to keep people like me down.

As we transition out of November and Native American Heritage Month, and into some other month of celebration of historically marginalized and oppressed people (December is National and Universal Human Rights Month) I hope we all continue, in our various roles, to remember the importance of representation. What books are in your classroom and school libraries? How are they displayed? Reflect on the makeup of the staff at your school. How can your hiring practices shift to include more people of color in roles that your students see? How can we push for money and programs (like the Oregon Administrator Scholars Program) that help people of color break barriers meant to keep them down? How are we supporting teachers to do culturally relevant work, and how do we as administrators push back against racist district, state, and federal mandates? We all have important roles to play in ensuring our students of color see themselves represented, and how white students see people of color in this racially unjust system of education.

Gillian Murr is an educator in Portland, Oregon for the past nine years. This year she is the Climate Specialist at a middle school and an administrator intern. She is white, Walla Walla, and Dakota descent.

LEANNE MOLL

My mother and I attended the same high school in southern Oregon -- a high school that to this day has an Indian mascot. When we attended, thirty years apart, there was a graffitied teepee in the main plaza and a large caricature of a Native Plains chief with a red bulbous nose and headdress. These symbols have now been removed, but the mascot name remains despite the State Board of Education's ban on Native mascots in 2012. My mother dropped out of that high school at age 17. She struggled to reconcile her Native identity with a historically and geographically inaccurate representation of her people. While my mother never completed high school or college, she read voraciously, and read to me. She made sure that I was connected to L'Anse, her mother's birthplace, even though we were displaced in southern Oregon.

When I attended that same high school, I wrote fiery opinion pieces about removing the mascot name and imagery. As if to make up for her silence, I spoke out loudly, even though my opinions were unpopular. I was attacked for my appearance, teachers and students alike asked if I was adopted or if I had a long-lost "Indian princess" relative. This has been a common narrative throughout my life. I'm not blond anymore as I was when I was a young child, but I am light-skinned, freckled, and light-eyed, and I've always been white-passing. My mother is an enrolled member of the Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa tribe and my father is white. Physically, I look after my grandfathers, both blond hair and blue eyes.

Keweenaw Bay is federal recognized tribe (there are between 400 and 500 tribes that aren't recognized in the United States) and my mom is a card-carrying member. However, because our family has not lived on a reservation since the 1950s and we are geographically displaced from the upper peninsula of Michigan, we don't quite count as Native to most people. I get it. I do. Historically, many non-indigenous people have claimed to be indigenous to stake a claim in (i.e. steal) tribal land or resources. Despite my distance from our land and despite my skin, I claim both whiteness and Nativehood, because there's a knowing in my bones that has been shaped by my mother, and her mother, and her mother before her.

The debate surrounding who gets to be a Native American has been intensely contested for years. The question of Native identity can never be boiled down to DNA. What if your tribe has never existed in the eyes of the government? If you're not on a tribal roll or don't possess a CDIB (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) card? If the Natives you grew up with belong to a different tribe from yours? If you're adopted or passing or married in? The question surrounding identity is incredibly complex.

In my experience, belonging has involved so much more than a blood test. It's about reciprocity. It's about time spent in communities. It's who raised you, who showed up for you, who broke bread with you, and who held you up when you thought you could no longer go on. It's claiming a community and having them claim you. Part of claiming kinship, particularly as someone who benefits from white privilege like I do, is to assume some of the risks and burdens of the community you're claiming. It's easy for a white person to claim they have Cherokee ancestors when they don't have to worry about the racial or social inequities faced by those who don't pass as white. The more power a person has, the more responsibility they have to show up for communities that are less resourced than they are.

Years after I left my hometown and was teaching as a visiting professor at Syracuse University, I felt compelled to tutor students on the Onondaga Reservation in upstate New York. The disparity between the educational opportunities of my university students and the students I tutored on the reservation were staggering. During this time of discernment for me, an elder asked me if I was someone's daughter, a polite way of asking if I were Onondaga. I responded with a long explanation about not really belonging to my tribe despite my mother's status. After I finished, the man smiled at me and said, "I recognize you. So if anybody ever asks you, tell them you are my daughter. That should be enough."

This interaction and my work on the reservation cemented my desire to teach, to focus on literacy, and to work for racial and educational parity. As I began my first administrator job this year, I often reflect on if I am using my privilege to amplify the unheard voices of the students at my school. When I hear staff complain about families or admit they don't know how to meet students where they are at, I often repeat the sweet lesson taught to me by the Onondaga elder: "Treat this student as if she were my daughter. That should be enough." Every day, I try to co-create a school where my mother would have thrived—a school where Native students are respected, heard, celebrated, valued.

TIFFANY STUART

Cheela (hello in Siletz Dee-ni' tribal language). My name is Tiffany Stuart and I am an Oregon Administrator Scholar recipient. I am enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon. My parents are Marlene and Thomas Stuart. My grandparents are the late Robert and Maxine (Ben/Butler) Rilatos. I am currently completing my administrative internship hours at Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon.

Recently I was able to co-present to the Beaverton School District Administrators on the topic of building relationships and supporting teachers of color. My cousin and Oregon Teacher of the Year 2020-2021, Nicole Butler Hooton was my co-presenter. We both have been classroom teachers for many years and offered our story.

Southern Oregon University invited me to speak about the current conditions of boarding schools. This virtual event had many speakers and that gave historic knowledge from their personal and family experience at boarding schools. Indian boarding schools still operate today and administrators can have an impact on how they are operating. My plan is to go into administration and complete my doctoral degree while working in a school. My two children Nayson Tooya (Ten Bears) and Kwestanni Chuski (Six Butterflies) keep me going and motivate me to make changes in the school system to help them and all Oregon students be successful.

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