

Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry
Poem commentary by Henry Real Bird, 2020

Speaker: Henry Real Bird

Interviewer: Corby Skinner

Date of recording: July 28, 2020

Location: Billings, Montana, Yellowstone Public Radio

Length: 6 minutes, 3 seconds

START OF RECORDING

Corby Skinner: This is a recording of Henry Real Bird from the studios of Yellowstone Public Radio in Billings, Montana. Henry, you have a poem for us.

Henry Real Bird: Okay, the poem is entitled “Thought.”

[Henry Real Bird reads “Thought”]

CS: Thank you. Tell me, Henry, where did that poem come from?

HRB: This came from my grandfather, in my life, looking at the Wolf Teeth Mountains every morning, and so beautiful when it turns blue and green and white with snow, and then when the clouds are on the Little Big Horn and the sun’s way off by the Big Horn Mountains, you can see the cloud, but you can’t see the shadow until it touches the Wolf Teeth Mountains. So, thinking of thought, on how some people can’t see thought and move it around like that. It’s just amazing how shadow is there, you know that, but you can’t see that. And so just like thought, the thought is there but some people never get to know that thought. I done this when I was working for Janine at Little Big Horn College. The entrance of the old tribal gymnasium—there was a bulletin board there, and I had that bulletin board, and I’d put things of interest in there, plus events, and then I tried to write a poem every month to put in there. So, this was one of them. This is where this thing came from.

CS: I remember that gym. In fact, the college was little more than a gym and a couple trailers.

HRB: And a couple of trailers. We were all gathering people from the community. To know that a waitress at Bear’s Café—telling her that she can get a degree, and then finally meeting her as

a nurse. As a nurse. A lady that I recruited, she was a nurse. There's a lot of success stories and everything, but this is one that I'll never forget, yeah.

CS: And how large the college is now. Little Big Horn College—expansive in terms of the number of students and buildings. But when you were there, it really was little more than a trailer.

HRB: Yeah, we were all janitors and we cleaned our own area, plus more. And it was just a family, a beautiful family that we had. From that, as a teacher in a missionary type of mindset, to where you want to influence all the time—I sort of got over that.

CS: You got over it, or they got over you?

HRB: They got over me. Yeah, nobody listens to me no more. No, so that's what that poem is about. About a pure life of thought entering our institution. To be taught the good from the bad, and then wishing they get to know the good and to use the good in life. This is what we're talking about there, yeah.

CS: Thank you, Henry. A wonderful poem. I kept thinking school is like that because it's all there but you have to look, you have to keep watching. Thought's there but you have to take time to see.

HRB: Yeah. To see the mind work through the eyes—you can see through the eyes, when it finally clicks, and you can see it on the boards and chalkboard and how they write and everything else and all. And what you've been doing, trying to teach them, comes out and it's just a beautiful thing when you can finally get a horse to watch a cow.

CS: That's what I think college is all about. Thanks Henry.

HRB: All right, adios!

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