

Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry
Poem commentary by Ray Young Bear, 2020

Speaker: Ray Young Bear

Date of recording: August 26, 2020

Location: Meskwaki Settlement, Iowa, poet's home

Length: 7 minutes, 9 seconds

START OF RECORDING

[Ray Young Bear reads and performs "Wichihaka/The One I Live With"]

Ray Young Bear: My contribution to "Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry" is a Meskwaki word-song called "The One I Live With/*Wichihaka*." It was composed in 2005 for *Wasakekwe*, who is Stella Lasley-Young Bear, my companion. Her Eagle Clan name, *Wasakekwe*, means "The Sun's Glint on a Turning Eagle's Wing."

Not only does the song acknowledge the exquisiteness of her Woodland-style applique dress, oftentimes a family heirloom, it also compliments Stella's beauty. Rendered musically in Meskwaki and translated poetically into English, "The One I Live With" signifies my endearment for a companion who has shared half a century with me on the Meskwaki Settlement, our home.

This song was inspired by a traditional dance dress my late grandmother and mother wore during their lifetimes. From photographs of the dress taken around the 1930s, it may have been made before, making it close to being a century old.

The black velvet dress and blouse is decorated with floral designs outlined with white beads with light blue, gold and red beads on the inside.

During our 1985 Woodland Singers & Dancers tour of The Netherlands, Stella was fortunate to wear this finery because someone long ago sat for hours, days and months, beading in the lines, so that it may glide upon completion, over the earth in dance. From its existence, the finely-beaded velvet dress has heard so much tribal music, both social and sacred, that it virtually becomes a living element in the proper care of its beneficiaries.

With that as preface, Stella's song was drafted around 2005.

It was then published in the *Yellow Medicine Review* and *The Iowa Review*, in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Over the years the song has been updated through the addition of "Ke-," in the song's start or lead vocal, which essentially means "Your" in Meskwaki. This makes the song more personal. This song can be used, as presented here, in a social or tribal celebration dance setting where women are in traditional dance apparel.

END OF RECORDING