

## American Indian literature still expanding

NEW YORK (AP) — The words of Simon Ortiz mingle with the muffled sounds of city traffic that have drifted into an art studio where dozens have gathered to hear his poetry.

He closes his book and takes a deep breath. He scans his audience, searching for understanding and acceptance and is immediately greeted with warm, enthusiastic applause. People begin to cluster about him, eager to talk, eager to learn more about Indians in America.

Things weren't always this way for Ortiz, who grew up during a time when he had to fight just to be able to speak in his own language. Now, his poems, written in both English and Pueblo, allow him to keep his culture alive.

"It's a form of resistance," Ortiz says after his reading at the American Indian Community House in downtown Manhattan. "If there was not a body of literature, then Native people would be invisible. Sometimes the term 'Indian' is an abstract idea. But when we express ideas in literature, then we have a valid body of expression that's totally ours."

Ortiz and hundreds of other American Indian writers have spent the past three decades trying to establish a body of literature to keep their tribes visible.

Some contribute to small community newsletters and others publish in academic journals; some have works on best-seller lists. They write about poverty and government policies that long ignored Indians and even tried to eradicate them. They write about their rich heritages and ways in which Americans Indians manage to keep a strong connection to their cultures.

The membership list of the Native Writers Circle of the Americas gives some idea of how many Indian writers there are: at least 588.

That's a big leap from about 20 years ago, says Carol Bruchac, managing editor of The Greenfield Review Press in Greenfield Center, N.Y. Bruchac, who has been with the press for over 20 years, says when the company first started the North American Native Authors Catalog, it was a sheet of folded paper with about 100 titles from about 35 authors. These days, the catalog lists about 400 titles from more than

250 authors.

However, Bruchac's listing is incomplete because, in the late 1990s, as the number of American Indian writers soared, her press began specializing in writers from the Northeast. University presses now serve a large part of the market. Larger houses, such as Grove-Atlantic and Simon & Schuster, have published writers such as Sherman Alexie and Leslie Marmon Silko.

Having a face — and a voice — in the publishing world was slow coming.

Ortiz and other American Indian writers tell of childhoods in which they were pressured to speak only English at school: Ridicule and social isolation awaited youngsters who dared to utter even "good morning, teacher" or "thank you" in Pueblo. Such pressures were inspired by earlier government policies to destroy American Indian cultures by assimilating tribal youth.

Writer Geary Hobson, a Cherokee and Quapaw writer who grew up in Arkansas, says that when he was in elementary school, teachers often pressured him and other American Indian students to speak English only. Other kids made fun of those who spoke their own languages, he says.

"We were put in the back of the room because the teacher didn't know what to do with us," says Hobson, 62. "The teachers would kind of imply that we were backward."

Stories about similar experiences are included in "Growing Up Native American: An Anthology," edited by Patricia Riley. The book includes writings by 22 authors from the 19th and 20th centuries. Some writers recall a hostile educational system that included military-style methods.

Still, many mastered English, began telling their stories and eventually started what is known as the Native American Renaissance in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

One writer to emerge from that time was N. Scott Momaday, whose "House Made of Dawn," about an urban dweller who struggles to recall his traditional upbringing, won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize. Another writer, Marmon Silko, blended ancient rituals with contemporary American Indian struggles

in his 1977 novel, "Ceremony." Other authors included Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, Joy Harjo and James Welch. In 1981, Hobson and others at the University of New Mexico helped publish "The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature."

Hobson, who edited "Remembered Earth" and later founded the Native Writers Circle of the Americas, says the Native American Renaissance helped Indian writers realize they had peers, and therefore a literary presence.

"In 1968, most of us didn't know who the other Indian writers were. When 'House Made of Dawn' came along ... that kind of opened up things," Hobson says. "I thought, 'Hey this is really great. Indians are finally being recognized.' I still feel that way 35 years later."

Hobson, who wrote the 1999 novel "Last of the Ofos," says that Indian literature over the last 30 years has gone in different directions but has retained its original tone as writers take their works to new levels.

One example is writer Bently Spang, who also paints and makes videos. Spang, who grew up in a family of Crow tribal artists in Billings, Mont., says he tries to produce works that will speak to many generations in an American Indian voice.

"Without constantly expressing ourselves, we will become

what we have been framed as — which is a tragic, mythological culture that used to exist," he says.

His artistic skills took off after graduate school and work as a builder. Later, he was told that expressing himself culturally was risky and unprofitable.

"It made me want to express myself even more," says Spang. "Because Native art is so recognized as only one thing — traditional or romantic depictions of the past — I see myself as providing today's perspective of how we're living today."

Spang says his work is also a way to help younger generations learn from their own people instead of non-Indians. "I don't want my great-great-grandchild to learn what it is to be Cheyenne from another culture," he says.

Hobson, who teaches English at the University of Oklahoma, says works such as Spang's show that the Native American Renaissance is still growing.

Books are being made into films, which demonstrate a new way of storytelling. Alexie's "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" was the basis in 1998 for the movie "Smoke Signals."

And Adrian Lewis' 1995 novel, "Skins," was made into a film in 2002. The National Museum of the American Indian held its 12th film festival in December.

## Howlak Tichum

Gale Lawrence Sr.

Gale Lawrence Sr. passed away December 30. He was 62 years old. Mr. Lawrence was born on March 12, 1941, in Lapwai, Idaho, to parents Daniel Lawrence and Nora Jackson.

Mr. Lawrence, a member of Nez Perce, worked as a self-employed logger.

He is survived by sons Daniel Lawrence Sr. of Warm Springs, and Frederick and John Lawrence of Goldendale; and daughters Agnes Arthur, Valerie Fuiava, Stacy Logan, Caroline Lawrence, all of Warm Springs; and Kathy Lawrence of Goldendale.

He is also survived by sister Faye Compos of Lapwai, Idaho. He was preceded in death by his spouse, Marilyn, and son Gale Jr., and two sisters.



## Howlak Tichum

Gale Lawrence Jr.

Gale Lawrence Jr. passed away on December 30. He was 41 years old. Mr. Lawrence was born on August 17, 1962 in Redmond to parents Gale Lawrence Sr. and Marilyn Dick.

Mr. Lawrence worked as a sorter operator at the Warm Springs Forest Products Industries mill. He was married to Marva Lawrence. He is survived by his wife, and

their daughters Promise, Ester, Dorris and Dasha, and sons Gale Lawrence III, and Glen Whiz.

He is survived by brother Daniel Lawrence Sr. of Warm Springs; and Frederick and John Lawrence of Goldendale, Wash.; and sisters Agnes Arthur, Valerie Fuiava, Stacy Logan, Caroline Lawrence, all of Warm Springs; and Kathy Lawrence of Goldendale.



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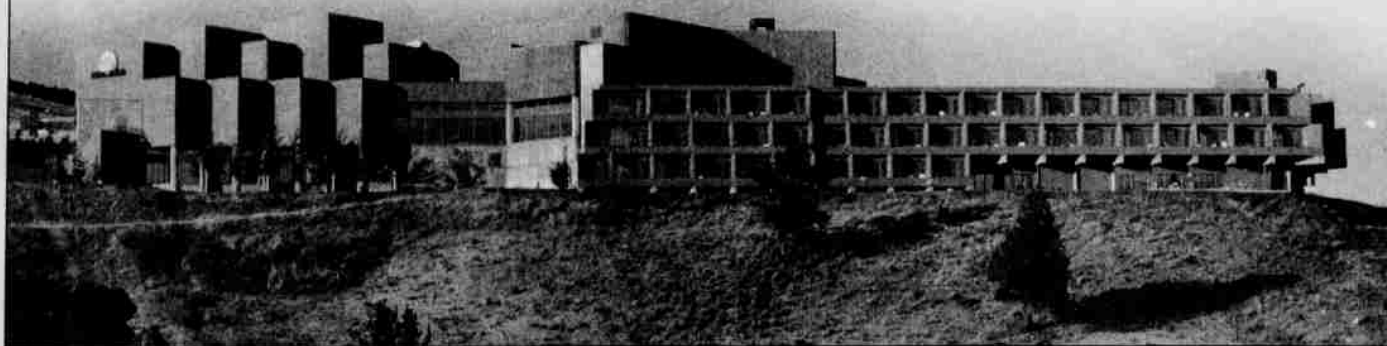
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