I am a Native woman, born and raised on the Grand River Territory. At an early age I moved to Toronto and married and raised my family. I have a strong love for literature, art and Native music. I am presently pursuing my acting career. I sit as an advisor on the Board of Directors for the Iroquoian Institute, “Onkwehonwe néha.” We the Board are working together to preserve the Iroquoian languages, culture and traditions which are our heritage and must be kept up. Along with this effort, I have also been working hard at trying to recapture my Native tongue, Mohawk, along with mastering the English language.

I am also involved with a fine working cast of Native people in the movie Divided Loyalties. This movie is about the struggle to power of the noble man, “thayendanega,” also referred to as “Joseph Brant.”

“A Native Prayer” and “A Swift Prey” are part of the art work I finished to go along with my story “Morning Star.”

The story is about a Mohawk girl during the seventeenth century, with her struggles before and after becoming a woman. She eventually is captured by her heart, to a very powerful warrior. The setting is a Mohawk village on the banks of the St. Lawrence River.

To my English teacher, Miss Sandy Springall, and the people of the Mohawk Nation, I inscribe this story.

Beads of sweat broke out across Laughing Water’s forehead. Another pain hit her. It was her second one this morning. She tried to rise from her squatting position on the shore of the great river. The snows had gone at last. She patted a handful of cool, clear water on her face and forehead. The pain eased itself. She must not scream out. She was a woman of the Mohawks.

Laughing Water filled her gourd, spilling none. She turned slowly and began walking back to the lodge. Soon her man would be awake. The camp began to stir. Dogs began their incessant barking. The birds were crying their mating calls. Laughing Water, always the first up in the morning, had already said her thanks to the Great Spirit and seen the morning star. As she entered the lodge another pain hit her.

Shining Moon knew it was time, and gently led her daughter to her sleeping robes and shooed everyone out of the lodge. The morning meal would wait.

White Eagle, wrapping his blanket of soft mink, as befitting a chief and warrior of his great nation around himself, slunk out. To make such a fine blanket, Laughing Water had tanned many hides and sewn them together with the sinew of a bull moose.

He strode toward the Great Water, his heart beating wildly. He remembered four times ago, during the season of the falling leaves, the birth of Running Bear his only son. Laughing Water had lain there for three setting suns before...
he heard the wailing cry. It was only now
that she could bear another child. He feared
for the life of his loved one.

On the river bank under a stately elm, he
left his blanket and breech-cloth; stepping
out of his moccasins he slipped into the
powerful current. He swam out till the
undertow began pulling at his legs, then
turned to shore.

After scrubbing his body with soft,
powdery sand, White Eagle again put on
his breech-clout, the fringes hanging well
below his knees. The beading on it was in
dyed porcupine quills and glittering glass
beads that were traded from the French
trapper for two beaver pelts. The work on
it was of an eagle, intricately done by
Laughing Water. Another pain shot
through his heart. He has to be near her.

White Eagle raised his arms to the dawn
and sang his morning song to the Great
Spirit. As he picked up his robe he heard
a faint cry which grew louder and louder,
blotting out all other sounds of the camp.
He began to walk faster. In his lodge he
knelt at Laughing Water’s side. Her face
wreathed in a smile. He took the small
bundle, wrapped in soft, white rabbit fur
and gazed in wonder.

White Eagle gently laid the wailing
bundle in Laughing Water’s arms. “Her
name is Morning Star, daughter of the
Mohawks,” she said before succumbing
to exhaustion.

Running Bear was now old enough to
play war games with the older boys. He
smack off into the woods. The first flowers
of Mother Earth’s awakening from her
long sleep were beginning to bloom. The
soft, velvety, green mosses he lifted lov-
ingly from the earth and then stole back to
camp. These things grew near his hide-a-
way in an old oak tree. He was careful not
to let the other boys see him because he
didn’t want to be teased like a girl.

Inside the lodge he went and sat by his
mother, looking at her sleeping face and
the new baby in her arms. Laughing Water,
sensing her son’s presence, opened her
eyes. She smiled at her son and in a voice
like the rippling water said, “Running
Bear, this is your sister, Morning Star,
dughter of the Mohawks. You must
always guard your sister’s life.”

Running Bear reached into his quiver
and gently withdrew the flowers and
mosses, passing them to his mother. Pride
bursting from him, he ran to join his
father. The strong smell of deer cooking
drove away the still lingering forest scent.
He was starving.

The next morning Laughing Water took
her daughter to the river to bathe. Taking
off her doeskin dress, Laughing Water
walked into the cold water. Shivering, she
scooped up handfuls of soft sand and
scrubbed her body till it tingled. After
rinsing her beautiful, long hair she waded
out of the river and unwrapped the tiny
bundle.

Cuddling Morning Star to her breast,
she walked back into the river. When the
water was up to her waist, she stooped and
gently began patting cool water on the
baby’s face and body.

Morning Star, shocked, began screaming.
No longer did the infant feel the warm
oil cleansing of her coming into the world.
He mother immersed her little body into
the cold water. With soft, gentle hands she
bathed her baby.

After leaving the river Laughing Water
pulled her soft, warm doeskin on and
lifed the baby high in her arms. The soft
rays of the morning sun warmed the
baby’s body. Her crying ceased. Laugh-
ing Water’s dark, brown eyes were shini-
ing as she gazed into the dawn. “Great
Spirit, let my child grow strong. Protect
her from the evil spirits.” Her voice sang
like the melody of many waters.

White Eagle sat studying his wife and
daughter over the early morning fire. It
was burning outside the lodge, now that
the snows were gone. The smoke from the
fires during the long, cold months had
harmed Shining Moon’s eyes. It was now
hard for her to see. The old grandmother
carefully combed out Laughing Water’s
long, black hair. It had the colour and
shine of a raven’s wing. White Eagle
knew his was exceedingly beautiful.
He loved her deeply. Morning Star, his
daughter, was fair and without blemish.
His son grew tall and strong. He felt great
joy in himself.

Today he would take out a hunting
party. The time when all the earth sleeps
had been hard and long. Their provisions
were low. He now had a new mouth to
feed, and needed fresh broth to give his
woman strength.

After the morning meal White Eagle
called together the warriors, designated
who would stay in camp, and went to see
Rain Maker the Shaman.

Rain Maker prayed to the Great Spirit
for a bountiful hunt. The young men who
had been hunting since childhood were
anxious for the hunt. This was one way to
show off their skills. They went on foot
through the forest, since their moccasins
were almost soundless. No game would
be frightened away today.

While the hunting party was away
Laughing Water gently blew cool water
from her mouth into the baby’s nostrils.
Then pinching them together. This was
repeated every time the baby started to
cry. One crying baby could cause the
death of a whole village. Thus the child
closed to cry.

The shifting wind caused the big stag
to raise his head cautiously. As he reared on
his hind legs, lifting his majestic head
high, Black Thunder’s arrow pierced his
neck. The deer turned to run, terrified.
Three arrows found their mark. There
would be feasting in the camp tonight.

The next few years were well in the land
of the Mohawks. Their crops of corn,
potatoes, squashes, beans of all sorts and
tobacco flourished. There were small raids
on the Hurons. The Hurons were bitter
enemies and hated by the Mohawks.

One day there was a great commotion
in camp. All the boys were running to the
river. Comes So Far had returned. He had
been gone many moons. With him he had
a wife of the Cree nation. She was very
beautiful with long, velvety hair and dark,
liquid eyes. Although she couldn’t speak
in the Mohawk tongue, her smile melted
the hearts of all who met her.

Comes So Far had many tales to tell of
his travels. White Eagle, eager to hear all,
made a feast. There was dancing and
singing far into the night.

Comes So Far told of his fight with the
great white bear in the land where the
snows are forever. He brought forth a bear
claw necklace, made from the bear’s paw
and tied it around Running Bear’s neck.
This would give Running Bear powerful
medicine. He would never in his lifetime
take it off. He sat in the place of honour
beside his father.

Next Comes So Far brought forth a
great, white bear skin, with fur soft and
white as the snow. This he gave to White
Eagle, his blood brother. They had hunted
and fought many wars together.

To Laughing Water he gave an awl,
made of a new kind of sharp steel, to
scrape her hides. This he said came from
a white man, with eyes the colour of the
sky, that was living in the land of the Cree.
To Rain Maker he presented the greatest gift of all, a hunting knife, like no one had ever seen before. Its handle was intricately designed in silver and inlaid with the turquoise stones that only a great man or a chief was allowed to have. Its steel blade was sharper than any of the knives the warriors carried.

Rain Maker lit his beautiful, carved, soapstone pipe and after raising his arms to the four winds and praying to the Great Spirit, they smoked in peace. Happiness was upon the village.

Before the brave could call out his warning, his blood spilled on the river bank. The Hurons, silent, powerful swimmers that they are surrounded the Mohawk camp. A small war party crept in, soapstone pipe and after raising his arms to the four winds and praying to the Great Spirit, they smoked in peace. Happiness was upon the village.

Running Bear brought his sisters to safety. He pulled the shrub aside, and into the old oak tree took his charges. Not a ray of light filtered in. It was cool and dry. The cries of the dead and dying filled them with pain.

Morning Star, silent tears streaming down her face cuddled the new, small baby in her arms. She would not cry out. She was a daughter of the Mohawks.

When the sounds of battle had died away, Running Bear carefully parted the bushes. Instructing Morning Star not to leave the hide-a-way till he returned for her, he crept out, moving slowly and silently back toward the camp. Never had such carnage assailed his eyes. He knew his boyhood had gone. Pain and frustration cut though him like a knife.

Many brave warriors had died defending their village. The death song was being sung all through the camp. Come So Far was gone to the Great Spirit, his wife captured by the Hurons. Black Thunder was singing his death song. Half of his scalp had been hacked away. He had many wounds. Rain Maker went through the camp, shaking his rattles and calling on the Great Spirit, driving the evil spirits from the village of the Mohawks. Their corn fields were just smoldering ashes. Running Bear and Many Horses locked arms and looked deep into each other's eyes. They would begin again, Warriors of the Mighty Mohawk nation.

White Eagle held Laughing Water in his arms. She was badly wounded. Running Bear brought the healing herbs to his father. White Eagle kept vigil for many moons over his woman. Slowly Laughing Water regained her strength. Her body healed, but her eyes never laughed again.

Morning Star grew in strength and beauty. The horror of the Huron raid never left her. Her baby sister, too frail and weak, died that winter. Her name was Little Bird, never to be spoken of again. Her grandmother Shining Moon, had died in the raid. Much sadness was in the hearts of this mighty nation.

Many Horses and Running Bear grew strong and tall and became great warriors. In their stories of battle they had counted coup many times. They took out many war parties. They avenged the Mohawks many times over for the deed done to them, by the hands of the bloodthirsty Hurons. Their great dugout canoes silently moved through the river many times during the next few years.

Many Horses became big in brave deeds, among his nation. He had a large herd of horses. When he came to ask White Eagle for Morning Star, he brought with him seven horses. These horses he had captured and broke. One was a black and white pinto, a war pony. Many gifts were sent to the lodge of White Eagle and Laughing Water.

Morning Star stepped out of the lodge into the bright morning sun. Holding the most beautiful stallion Morning Star had ever seen, was Many Horses.

Many Horses, looking deep into her eyes said, “this appaloosa is my gift to you, Daughter of the Mohawks.”

Many Horses lifted his bride onto the stallion. Morning Star sat proud. She knew the whole village was watching. The blue and red beads on her white doeskin dress glittered. Her moccasins, made from the same white doeskin, had small fringes around them. The beading of a beautiful star was intricately done on the top. Many Horse's heart beat loud and strong in his chest. Never had he seen anything so beautiful as his wife, woman of the Mohawks, Morning Star.

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A Seneca Indian Praise

by Twylah Nitsch (Yeh-Wen-Node)

Oh Great Spirit, We Awake
To another sun
Grateful for the gifts bestowed
Granted one by one —
Grateful for the greatest gift
The precious breath of life;
Grateful for abilities
That guide us day and night.

As we walk our chosen paths
Of lessons we must learn —
Spiritual peace and happiness
Rewards of life we earn.
Thank you for your Spiritual Strength
And for our thoughts to praise;
Thank you for your infinite Love
That guides us through these days.