

Christine Ballengee Morris
June King McFee Award



Bob Ballengee holding his daughter Christine Ballengee March 1956

One of my first memories of being influenced from outside of my family came from the Wizard of Oz and I was 4—I remember asking my father, “How could Dorothy, Tin man, Scarecrow and the Lion be friends because they were different?”



My dad explained that difference was good because they each brought strengths and together they made a strong team. This has stayed with me all my life. This award is like being a part of a strong group; we are different and yet it is our strengths together that is so moving and receiving this award is such an honor for me. When I found out that I was receiving this award, I contacted a few past honorees and asked them what did they talk about in their acceptance? Each spoke about their mentors and peer relationships and the need to have both for success. The process of writing this acceptance and choosing the photos reminded me how many wonderful people have participated in guiding me while I negotiate life.

Christine 17 years old cheerleader 1973



Belly Dancing my way through college



Flatfoot Dancing to the Music by David Morris and Band

Family and friends influenced me as well. My dad, an American Indian, taught me about being a risk taker and I continue to explore that concept and what that means. In high school I was a cheerleader and a dancer, which taught me to be a part of team. I also learned how to be an individual through dance as well--from belly dancing to flatfoot dancing, performing was and is important. There is such a powerful experience to connect with other dancers and or the musicians. My grandmothers were all dancers and encouraged me to pursue my passions. My mother was always carting me off to lessons or watch me perform, informally or formal—she was and is watching and giving me support.

Early in my life, I began to understand the importance of cultures and that continued when I was investigating cultural pedagogies while in graduate school for my dissertation. When I was four years old, I was in love with Roy Rogers. I did not know that he was racially the same as me—half American Indian and half Appalachian (a

regional United States cultural group that resides in the southern region and had migrated from the British Isles and Italy)—I only knew that he was a cowboy, rode horses, and saved people on television every Saturday morning. My Appalachian cousins loved to play cowboys and Indians and I just loved to play. So, every Saturday afternoon, we set out to create our version of the Wild West. I was informed that since I was an Indian I would play the Indian part. The only problem with that role-playing was that I was always killed at the beginning and lay on the ground, while my cousins rode their stick ponies and laughed triumphantly. One day, in a four-year old style, I grew tired of my demise and cried my story to my mommy. Our suggested solution to my predicament was to buy an official Dale Evans outfit.

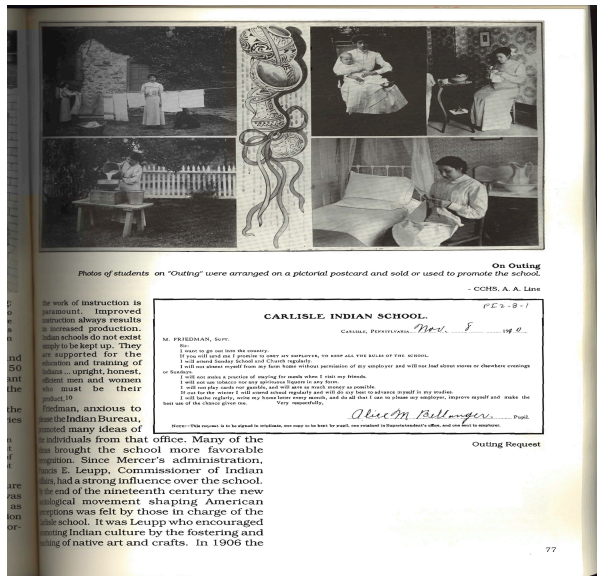


I knew that with the right outfit my troubles would be over. Once I had the outfit, the next Saturday I waited for my cousins. It was then that I learned that one could be “too much” of something or “not enough” of something else; therefore never being “enough of

anything.” My cousins told me that no matter what I wore, I would always be an Indian; and they were right, but I was also part of them, but that was not what they saw.

Racism, categorizing, and invisibility are hard concepts to negotiate when you are four years of age. What I did not realize until recently was that this would be one of many life journeys and would define me because I allowed it to. How does one act as “half” of anything? I have spent a great amount of time exploring halves, wholes, and power. For me, it comes down to power. It was not that my *Indianess* visually prevailed and that my cousins did not know I shared their blood too, because they did. It was about their power to oppress me and my voice—at least one half of my voice—was weakened by its segregated sever. I was like an Oreo cookie, split in half and dunked into milk for the pleasure of others. Or should it be that I was more like an apple, cut into wedges, or is it red velvet cake with white icing? Or like a banana whose yellow peel can be pulled back to reveal the soft, sweet white interior?

My cousins were children, as was I, and our lack of any understanding of race, ethnicity, identity construction, or invisibility is certainly acceptable and predictable. But that incident and more to come consumed me, and once I put the halves together and concentrated on learning from those before, and those of my contemporaries, the content and pedagogical style of my scholarly and artistic work came to the space of deobjectification and liberation, which is why I wanted to learn how to encourage cultural understandings for the next generations.



An image from a book about Carlisle Industrial School, Pennsylvania where my great aunt was forced to attend. this is a poor image of her work certificate with her signature.

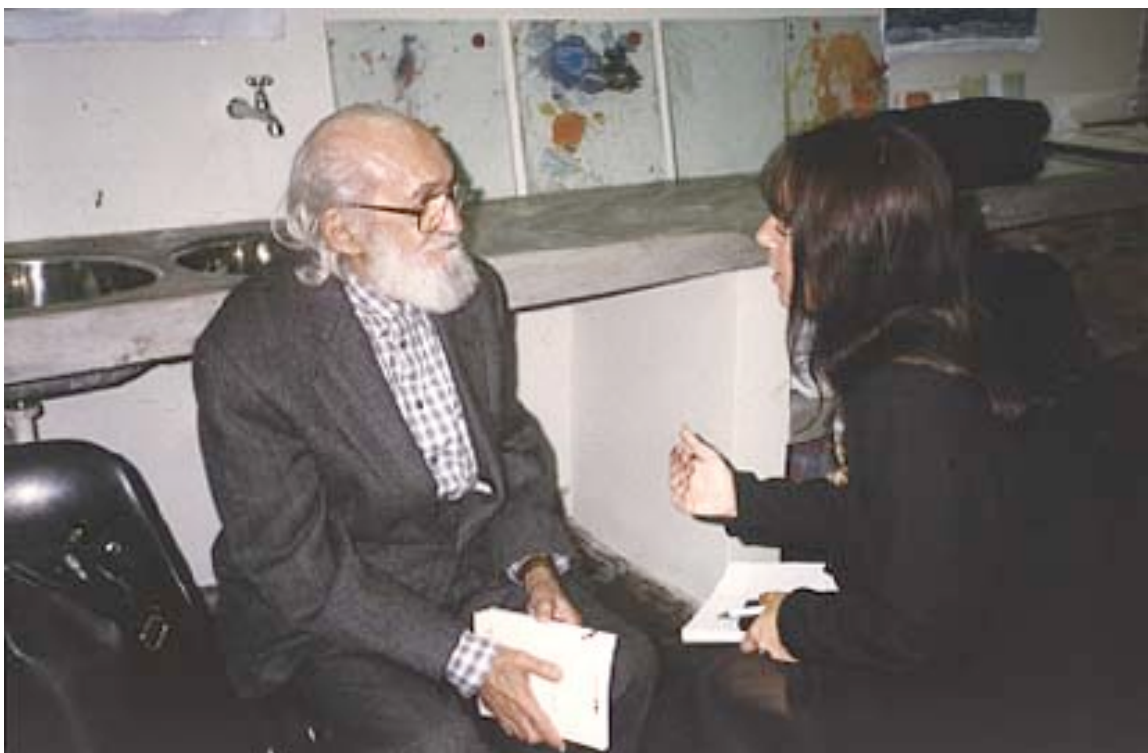
The exploration of indigenous issues, for me, began with my own personal discoveries of my own tribal affiliation and problems such as colonialism, socio-economic disparities and inequities, appropriation, and culturally driven evolution of the arts and how that knowledge is transferred. Although my research began with a personal examination, the theory, multiple understandings, and worldview perspectives were developed in Brazil, as a graduate student and guest of the United States Consulate and University of Sao Paulo through arrangements by Christina Rizzi, curator of the university's indigenous anthropological museum. Together with Karai Mirin, we wrote about the Guarani Nations' attempt to establish tribal curricula within their public educational system, as well as discuss indigenous pedagogy.



Karai Mirin and family with me in Sao Paulo. Photograph by Christina Rizzi

Many Native people in the Amazonian region have not experienced that type of impact and being able to observe the initial phases of colonial interruption helped me to understand the complexities and ambiguities of colonialism and self-determination.

While I was in Brazil, I was introduced to Paulo Freire.



He smiled, patted my hand and asked me if I spoke Portuguese because he preferred to speak in his language. I admitted that my Portuguese was at a two year old level. He laughed and decided that it would probably be best if he continued to speak English. One thought that Freire expressed during our interview was important to me personally, “Education is a process that requires collaboration, democracy requires patience, and life requires both.”



David Morris

Last but not least, my husband, David Morris, and his support and inspiration has moved me so much and has taught me how to be more supportive. Without his suggestion for me to go to graduate school, may not have happened. It was him that said go back to school and find the answers in how to create a better educational system. My sons and grandsons have taught me how to unconditionally love and be loved.



Major Jason Meisel, my son and Julian, my grandson



Jack Ballengee

And my friends, Pam Taylor, Billie Sessions, Steve Carpenter, Pat Stuhr, Deb Smith Shank, and many more have taught me so much and have been there when I needed help.



Christine, Pam, and Deb being singing stars at NAEA, Baltimore 2010

I was born with a Congenital Heart Disease and had open-heart surgery when I was 20 years old. I thought that I was fixed, but I wasn't and still have issues. In 2010, I had to have another heart procedure, two brain surgeries, and experienced a stroke.





Pam came to my home to help me and my family copes with the experiences and the changes. Without her, my initial experience as Art Education Journal's editor would have been a disaster. Steve, Pat, and Deb did all they could to help me, which all comes back to Dorothy, Tin man, Scarecrow, and the Lion. The power of friends and unconditional love, support, and collaboration are powerful nouns and actions that can alter one's journey and increase one's quality and success. Thank you everyone for helping me to have such a great life.



I became a billboard and my parents pose—what can I say