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Author

Lowery, Christine T.

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From the Outside Looking In: Rejection and Belongingness for Four Urban Indian Men in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1944-1995

CHRISTINE T. LOWERY

These stories are excerpted from life histories of four urban Indian men speaking within the broader context of their addiction and recovery. These interviews are the most recent, abstracted from a research study (1993-1995) on addiction and recovery processes with American Indian women and men experiencing at least two years of recovery from alcohol. The chronology stretches from memories of childhood in 1944, through the 1960s and 1970s, problems with addiction in the 1980s, and recovery processes in the early 1990s. This study focuses on a sample of Indian men (ages 35-53) who are Wisconsin natives, share Oneida or Chippewa ancestry, are second-generation urban dwellers, and see themselves as Indian men. All have lived in Milwaukee, "A Gathering of the Waters" on Lake Michigan located north of Chicago, for at least twenty-five years. These men qualify as embodiments of Vizenor's crossbloods—"the postmodern tribal bloodline":¹ Chippewa, Irish, Oneida, Mexican, Serbian-Croatian. The crossblood encounters are communal rather than tragic, and these stories

Christine T. Lowery is a Laguna-Hopi from Paguate, New Mexico. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Social Welfare.

are “splendid considerations of survivance.”² It is the communal that is emphasized in this telling.

As the men relate their childhood and adolescent experiences, we get a glimpse of Milwaukee neighborhoods. The psychosocial revelations form a common pattern, ranging from emotional and physical neglect to abandonment and felt rejection at the hands of parents who all drank, or from foster parents who withheld emotional sustenance. In the section that follows, we explore how the men construct “belonging” in their addiction, and we follow one man in his step-by-step recognition of belonging in his recovery in his return to the Indian community. We are witness to the cognitive and emotional work the men continue. The stories of the four men are as much about addiction as they are about recovery, as much about not belonging as constructing fit, as much about who they are as about who they are becoming.

BACKGROUND

Indian Milwaukee is readily identified by Potawatomi Bingo located in the industrial part of the city, just across the Milwaukee River from downtown. Potawatomi Bingo is one of the primary sponsors of September’s Indian Summerfest, one of several ethnic celebrations on the lakefront. The Milwaukee Indian Community School (MICS), grades one through eight, has served the community since 1969. MICS is housed in the former Concordia College buildings on west Kilbourn Avenue and the Migizi Express, the school newsletter, serves as a community newsletter as well. The Indian Health Board serves the Indian community with two clinic sites, one near the community school and the other in south Milwaukee off Mitchell on 11th. Social services are sponsored by tribes, for instance, Oneida Social Services. Organized church services are sponsored by the United Methodist Native American Ministry, Catholic Congregation of the Great Spirit, and the Siggenauk Interfaith Spiritual Center.

The 1980 census indicates that 30.1 percent of the American Indian population in Wisconsin resided in fourteen designated central city areas. Almost 5,000 Indians were counted in Milwaukee, with 1,300 Indians counted in Green Bay. Thirty-two percent of the Indian population lived on reservations, while 37.2 percent lived in rural areas and small towns. The

Indian population had grown since the 1970s, largely due to the improvements in counting American Indians, lowered mortality rates, and increased fertility rates. In 1980, the overall count of American Indians in Wisconsin was just under 29,500, less than 1 percent of the state's total population.³

The 1990 census data counted 1,733 Indian households in Milwaukee, with a base Indian population of 5,650. Females head 35.9 percent (622) of these households and 47.6 percent (296) live below poverty levels; 4.4 percent (88) are headed by males and 34.1 percent (30) live below poverty levels; 38.2 percent (597) include married couples and 11.1 percent (66) live in poverty; 24.6 percent (426) are non-family households (poverty rates for this group are not listed). The data for educational attainment for Indian persons twenty-five and over (3,022 total) show that 33.6 percent (1,014) did not have a high school education and 241 had less than a ninth grade education; 30.3 percent (917) are high school graduates; 30.4 percent (918) have some college or associate degree; 5.7 percent (173) have a bachelor's degree or more college, including 57 (in Milwaukee County) with graduate professional degrees.⁴

SAMPLE AND STUDY METHODOLOGY

Mike, age fifty-five, was born in the county hospital in Waukesha, west of Milwaukee off the current I-94 freeway. Mike is one-fourth Oneida, one-sixteenth Ojibwa, and eleven-sixteenths Serbian-Croatian. Bill is full-blood Oneida, born in Green Bay at the juncture of Wisconsin's peninsula, a slender finger pointing north across Lake Michigan to the Hiawatha National Park in Michigan's upper peninsula. He was raised in foster care on the Oneida reservation, southwest of Green Bay, until he left for the military in Texas at eighteen. Gus, age forty, and Fred, age thirty-five, share a connection to Odanah where Chequamegon Point reaches out for the Apostle Islands in Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin. Gus, three-fourths Irish and one-fourth Chippewa, was born in Ashland, nestled in Chequamegon Bay and west of Odanah, and lived with his maternal grandparents for four years while his mother and his Oneida stepfather migrated to Milwaukee. Fred, half Chippewa and half Mexican, lived in Odanah for "two or three years" as a child.

The men started drinking when they were fifteen or sixteen and quit drinking within two years of each other, between 1989

and 1991. Mike reports a drinking history with cocaine and heroin use of thirty years; Bill claims twenty-five years of drinking; Fred reports ten years; and Gus describes a drinking period of thirteen years including a marijuana use history of eighteen years.

The men were serially interviewed from mid-1995 to mid-1996. Mike, Bill, and Fred each participated in six interviews, Gus in four interviews. Each man was interviewed over a two-month period; each interview lasted an hour and a half. All interviews were paid.

The analysis of the data for this article is limited to thematic description. Rejection and belongingness are two themes that are explored because of their consistency across the lives.

The “Growing Up” Stories

In this section the men’s childhoods are presented in their own voices and in the order in which they were born. Two connecting themes emerge, a felt emotional abandonment of a parent or foster parent encased in an environment that supports drinking behavior. Mike has an environment filled with male relatives and a strong Croatian grandmother, but the emotional environment is characterized by loneliness. Bill completed high school as expected, but his existence is isolated within a family environment of which he is not a part. Fred dropped out of school in the ninth grade when his mother left the home. Playing pool became his identity and stealing perpetuated the small cycle of his survival. Gus took care of his brothers and sisters while his parents and aunts and uncles drank; he discovered his ability to write and wallows in his ability to play music, in his addictions, and in his struggles with relationships.

MIKE: “WALKING AROUND WITH A CHIP ON MY SHOULDER”

Mike, age fifty-five, has early memories of his paternal grandmother’s house in West Allis, now on the southwestern periphery of Milwaukee proper, but home to a compound of small farms in 1944. His “life began” at age five when his father was given custody of the small boy after the divorce from his mother, part Ojibwa, part Oneida, who struggled with schizophre-

nia and alcoholism. His father brought the boy from the south-side of Milwaukee, from the home of his Indian mother and her parents, to a Croatian household steeped in a legacy of politics, hard work, heavy drinking, and even moonshine production at one point in the family history. His Croatian grandmother was the "cornerstone" of the family and would be the dominant figure in his life, hard at work cooking, making sausage, canning, gardening, butchering farm animals. His grandfather was a "practicing alcoholic." As an adult, Mike felt he knew his grandfather better than most people, admiring his grandfather's commitment to the communist party and the humanitarian effort beneath a stern exterior.

In 1944, Mike's father left to finish his obligation to "fight the fascists" in the Air Force. Mike was caught up in the family tradition of politics at a time when the boundaries were clear: "You were either for the people, a socialist thinking or minded person, or you were a fascist or a Nazi."

He was a child with "no parents," "treated like a little prince" by his grandparents for two years, resented by his uncles who straddled adolescence and early manhood, and whose memories as an adult still harbor feelings of loneliness and a desire for affection and closeness:

I think that there were a lot of people coming up in that era, people came up through hard times. I know even from my mother's parents it was hard, and for my dad's parents, I know it was very difficult; they were people of the land, peasant people. So I guess they really didn't know how to show their feelings. I remember one of my dad's last days at the Veteran's Hospital [he was dying of cancer]. He had been reading a book, the title had something to do with expressing love. I guess that was something he had come to recognize.

Mike's relationship with his father was "never as close as" he wanted it to be. When his father was discharged from the military, the five-year-old Mike saw him coming down the road. I remember my grandma saying, "Oh, go out there and greet your dad. Give him a big hug."

So I was all excited about that ... and was prepared to give him a hug, and I remember he stuck out his hand to shake hands. I felt like I had been hit with a stick. Rather than an embrace, he said something about being a young man.

I think of rejection as something I was keenly aware of. I still am trying to overcome that. For most of my life I was walking around with a chip on my shoulder. And when I was being sent to the children's home, I feel that my grandmother loved me dearly, but I still took that as a form of rejection. And that was kind of traumatic for me, being dumped off, a hundred miles from home.

Sending Mike to a boarding school in Des Plains, Illinois, at age seven was intended to make a Croatian boy out of him, to teach him the language, to play a musical instrument, and to learn the dances. Somehow, none of that happened. He was home at age nine when his father remarried, started school with neighborhood friends, spent time with his grandparents, and had infrequent visits with his mother. "What nationality are you?" was a frequent question, but less disturbing than teasing about "growing up around his ears," a dilemma that became the focus of inquiries about cosmetic surgery, which was prohibited by the cost. In junior high, he would drink a can of cold beer under a hot sun while working with the male members of his family. His first experience with being stumbling drunk "opened doors for me, or I thought that it did." Interaction with others became easy and he "didn't know anyone could feel that good." Still he never dated in high school; the fear of rejection was too great.

BILL: "I WAS JUST A WORKER "

Bill was born in late summer of 1949 in Green Bay, the largest town near the Oneida reservation and the current site of the Oneida tribe's casino and hotel. In 1956, Bill was six when his mother died of tuberculosis in a sanatorium in Wisconsin; she had been ill for some time and he cannot remember her. He, his brother, and his sister were removed from their maternal grandmother's home and placed in the Oneida community. Charlotte, a longtime friend of his mother's, asked that Bill be placed with her, her white husband, and her grandchildren. Bill was somewhat isolated from Indian children at that point, except for interactions at school. Charlotte shopped in Seymour "because her husband was white" instead of the Indian town of Oneida, and Bill did not have contact with his relatives.

Bill was raised with an Indian foster mother active in the politics of her tribe and he would accompany her to meetings.

He understood early that his place in this family group was primarily economic. "I was just there to help her," Bill remembers. She needed someone to clean house, to help cook, and in the summertime to report what happened on daytime soap operas. Bill compared his relative freedom of the house to his foster mother's grandchildren who did most of the outdoor chores on the farm, and he considered himself lucky to get such light duty. However, after a dishonorable discharge from the Air Force, he tried to return "home" at age twenty and was permitted to stay for a week. "We're not getting paid for you anymore," he was told. "This is not your home. You have to go live with your relatives." Bill commented, "They won both ways. They got a free worker and they got paid for it. . . . It was a family environment, but I wasn't part of it; I was just a worker."

From the age of six, his Oneida foster mother taught him to work, and this would become the life theme he would use to separate himself from "the rest of the drunks and the homeless." She also taught him to make sure he was "dressed clean," had a haircut, to tell people the truth "because it's going to come right back on you anyway." His white foster father was an avid hunter, and this freed Bill in a way. "I enjoyed a free life, hunting, fishing. . . . we had access to firearms at all times." Later, he understood the relationship between working and being free in a different way; the more he worked, the more he could drink.

FRED: "KEEPING TO MYSELF"

Fred was born in Odanah, Wisconsin, in 1960 to a Chippewa mother and a Spanish/Mexican father from Arizona. He grew up on the near northside of Milwaukee around 38th and Galena in a mixed neighborhood with Indians, whites, blacks, and Puerto Ricans. The neighborhood wasn't bad. There were lot of fights. "You used to be able to walk down the block and everybody would be sitting on their porch. By the time you got two blocks away, you would be all drunk and high. You would have to turn around and go back home. Everybody was partying on their porches." Pabst Blue Ribbon was the "big thing in them days," and the closing of the Pabst Brewery in 1996 is testament to change in the economic structure of the Milwaukee brewing industry.

Fred spends little time thinking about the past because "it seems like there was really nothing there." He dropped out of

school in the ninth grade, the year his mother and father divorced. His mother left home when he was fourteen, and he and his sister were alone. His father worked in a foundry and is still there after thirty years and was just as consistent in his emotional absence as was Fred's mother. From the time Fred was nine until he was about fifteen, his father owned a bar.

[My father] would get up and go to work at 6:30 in the morning and worked until 3:30, come home, eat something and go to sleep until 6:30 at night, then go to the bar till the bar closed. Then when the bar closed, he would come home and go to sleep and get up and go to work. That was the whole routine all the time, even on weekends, he was at the bar all the time. . . . I never really seen him anyways. He used to just leave and say, "Here's some money, get something to eat," and that was it. . . . As I got older, I'd see him in bars.

When the family physically separated, Fred stayed with a friend and his family who lived a couple of houses down the street. The first few months, he waited until the family was "done eating" before he would eat. After that, "it was just like I was their kid. My mother didn't like it, but what can you do? I had to do something. . . . fourteen is an awful age to be out there on your own." Fred's older sister was eighteen and left to live with her boyfriend for a year. When she returned home a year later, she brought her first baby and a welfare check. By this time, his father had found another girlfriend and moved in with her: "I don't know what you guys are going to do, but this is what I'm doing, good-bye." Fred and his sister both lived off welfare, supplemented by Fred's growing ability to play pool and win.

"I grew up in the bar, " Fred reminisces about his adolescence. His experiences in his father's bar started with mopping the floors at age twelve, learning how to play pool from the Mexican men who frequented the bar when he was fourteen, and graduating to playing pool for money by the time he was sixteen. In three years, he roamed the near north side and south side looking for a good pool game and was "one of the top ten pool players" in the city at one time.

His street life entailed stealing; steak knives, nail files, and even forks were filed to open doors and start cars. Fred remembers his adolescent prowess at fifteen (1975):

I ain't braggin' or nothing, but at fifteen there wasn't a car made that I couldn't take. We would take them on 2nd and Mitchell [Milwaukee's southside], strip them down there. They use to give up \$50 for a Cadillac... Then those were the best cars you could get.

Fred combined stealing cars and bikes, income from playing pool, and a budding interest in cars and car maintenance to finance his life in his late teens. "I had a 1971 Ford Galaxy 500, white with a black vinyl top," he boasts, then softens, "my pride and joy. I stole two bikes and car to pay for that car." By the time he was nineteen, he was finished stealing:

I remember stealing a truck and they caught me. That scared me. I was trying to hot wire it laying on the seat and [the man] grabbed me, holding me up. I punched him right in the forehead and I must have broken his nose.... He was in a daze and he went down and I took off and he was chasing me down the alley. . . . A couple of times when I would steal a car or a stereo there would be dogs, and then those lights would come on. It was just a time you knew everything is just getting too close. It was going to be that time for you to get caught and that's what stopped it.

In his late teens, Fred started a pattern of finding girlfriends with apartments, living with them until he was kicked out for not ever being home, and bouncing back to his sister's place. By the time he was nineteen, he had a broken marriage and a young son.

Contact with his mother during the first two years she was gone was intermittent. She'd stop by every few months with money for food, and at sixteen he'd run into her in bars:

I think she might be gay. Her and this roommate have been living together for about twenty years almost. . . . I asked her about it one time, and she slapped me. . . . I wanted to punch her in the face, you know. I just asked her if she's happy now, "You feel good now?" I used to see her when I used to go out and drink in the bars, she was always trying to be a mother figure, trying to tell me what to do ... trying to be bossy. All the time when she was drinking, you know. I used to say, "Look, you left. I am only doing what I am doing. You should have thought of that before you left the house. You should have took me with you!"

GUS: "WE WERE STILL WITH THE FAMILY, SO HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THAT'S NOT THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSE TO BE?"

My dad was not an Indian man and nobody wanted to talk about it. . . . Once in while when [my aunts and uncles] would be drinking too much, they'll say something, but who pays attention to people that drink? . . . I'm going on the assumption it was a one-night stand . . . and so right from the start, I was living with somebody else.

Gus' mother was nineteen when he was born, and for awhile it was the two of them. Later, he stayed with his maternal grandparents on the Bad River Reservation in northern Wisconsin for three years when his mother married and moved to Milwaukee. Then he moved in with his Oneida stepfather's mother for a couple of years. By the time he was in grade school, he was in Milwaukee. He had nosebleeds that would not stop and a heart condition that prevented activity in gym classes. This demanded his mother's attention for at least half of each year as they sought treatment from clinic to children's hospital and back again. Being a "sickly kid" also intermittently released him from the omnipotent structure of a Catholic school, but not the drinking lifestyle of his extended family:

When I was growing up, we were pretty much shoved together, the cousins ... because the aunts and the uncles would go out hitting the bars on Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays, and so we all had to watch out for each other. We were pretty much on our own ... I would say from five to thirteen. And we took that as being the norm. A lot of Indian people we knew were doing the same things, so we just thought that's the way things were done. We were still with the family, so how do you know that that's not the way it's suppose to be?

As a thirteen-year-old, Gus was influenced by protest-style music, Vietnam, rock and roll. He would imitate the song styles of Steppenwolf, John Lennon and the Beatles, and the Doors. This was the year he became "fiercely Indian." He responded to a writing assignment by blaming the Catholic Church for everything that had happened to the American Indian in a fledgling protest song. He and his mother were called into the

principal's office for suspected plagiarism because his academic background did not predict the quality of writing. His mother made him proud. "It was the first time I ever seen a nun cringe. My mom says, 'Goddammit! I seen him sit down and write this shit!' . . . I decided right about eighth grade to become a writer."

At the same time, he was pulling his parents out of bars, stopping fights between them, and lifting money from his stepdad's wallet to feed his brothers and sisters. His role found company with other kids who had pain, black and white youths whose "houses smelled like stale beer" and who were taking care of their siblings. The only time he saw Indians was when he visited his cousins on the westside, in the Concordia Park neighborhood of Milwaukee, "Indian country" in the 1960s and 1970s. In Concordia Park, west from Water Street to Sherman around 35th on the east, from Lisbon on the north to I-94 on the south, he and his cousins could "go from one block to another and either meet somebody that was related to us or was from the same reservation."

In the early 1970s, Wilber Wright middle school on 84th and Burleigh was busing students. This forced a "war" between black kids and white kids with about three Indian kids caught in the middle. The only joining they did was to smoke joints with kids in their neighborhood. The transition to Marshall High School on 64th and Fiebrantz just off Capitol was "totally" different. It was no longer blacks and whites, but "freaks" and "greasers," and marijuana was plentiful. The greasers were "these tough little white kids," Fonz imitators, "with fast cars, T-shirts, and women with poufy hair."

Gus was a "freak" with patchy blue jeans, long hair, military coats with upside down patches." Here, he found similar drinking patterns and problems among kids who came from "really nice houses" in "really nice neighborhoods." "I guess there's different economics [which] give you different choices of alcohol. Our parents could afford Blatz beer and Pabst Blue Ribbon and these people drank Schlitz ... mai-tais, gin and tonics."

Gus was going to be a rock and roll star. He could play a decent guitar, and he and black and white friends formed the "ultimate basement band." The group did their best work—Yes, Captain Beyond, Hot Tuna, "bluesy rock," obscure Credence, or new Santana, "aggressive music [requiring] technical proficiency"—in the basement of the Catholic church, starting on Friday nights and plunging into the next daylight.

They were plagued with technical problems and the short-fused tempers of insecure adolescents on pot, but managed to make disasters out of their performance work. Acid was an experimental drug, pot and speed were used regularly, and sex was hot and heavy, just skirting the edge of paternity. High school English class and writing "angry, young teenage-boy, type crap" were the only things that kept him in school until he felt "they couldn't teach me anymore." Actually, Gus was kicked out.

Constructing Belonging

How do these men construct a sense of belonging in their addiction and recovery processes? A continuum of belonging is evident, starting with Bill's statement of having "no belonging, having no one" and moving to Gus' situation in which he describes his relationships as strong in all areas and characterized by a sense of stability. The data from the men indicate that relationship is part of belongingness within the context of a defined community. For example, Gus returns to the Indian community for recovery, understanding that there is something there that he is unable to find in the dominant society substance abuse treatment centers. Mike, in spite of his strained relationships with "the woman I am married to" and the throes and woes of his postadolescent daughters, now drives to powwows by himself and seeks companionship with other Indian men in the community who are involved with spiritual leadership.

While the theme of work is strong for each man, in the past, it served as the final line between alcoholic and "skid row bum" for both Mike and Bill. For Fred, work is a way to make money for his family, but his family and the mental health of his children are far more important, and he searches for ways to extend what he has done for his kids to other kids, kids like him, growing up without parents. And work for work's sake is expendable when a more connective environment is present for Gus. After he was kicked out of high school, Gus started working in a restaurant, from the bottom up, washing pots and pans, learning the business from the inside out, working his way up to head chef and manager. In 1991, he quit the restaurant business cold:

You just don't have a life. I never met an old, happy chef. What do you do every holiday? You're working. And how

late do you work? You work late. What do you do when you are done? There's nothing open except bars, nothing to do. Who do you hang out with? Other restaurant people. I wanted my degree. I wanted to finish school, and I went and got it and then, I said, "Fine."

And with that degree, his writing and teaching have taken on new meaning, but in an integrated way as discussed in the conclusion.

The following stories provide a summation of where each man was in his thinking when the interviews were concluded in 1996. The common theme throughout these excerpts is belongingness, whether as a temporary member of a group as in Bill's military experience, or manifested as Mike's desire for respect as an experienced man in his stint as a neighborhood heroin dealer, or found in Fred's only knowledge of community played out in bars and pool rooms, or part of Gus' recovery story that brings him back into the Indian community.

MIKE: "SATISFYING A WAY TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF"

Mike relates his heroin experiences in the Mexican community on Milwaukee's southside when he "was a Mexican." Mike's "Mexican years" started in the 1960s with the introduction to Nick Zoric's, a neighborhood Serbian bar, by his maternal uncle, "the original Indian Mike."

By the time he met his second wife, a woman of mixed Puerto Rican heritage, Mike was well into cocaine and moving quickly toward heroin.

Up until I met the person who is now my second wife, I think I felt like most mainstream people felt about drugs, other than alcohol. It was like all part of an evil force, whereas being an alcoholic was okay. I liked cocaine. I had been smoking pot on and off, and I had sampled amphetamines and life in the circus. Maybe I would have gotten into those if I knew who to see, how to go about it, but alcohol pretty much did the job for what I wanted. It was handy and legal; it worked for me. And then pot smoking was ... kind of a social happening. I got to where I used it not a lot ... but I used it fairly frequently during the prime of my use of drugs, when I used a combination of alcohol and cocaine and marijuana to reach Nirvana ... the Creator, or God, or

some other force. I think I'd converse with the refrigerator because I felt sure it was trying to make contact with me [Mike laughs]. I'd sit up at the kitchen table and I'd drink and smoke and snort, and try and consume what was left of the cocaine I might have. I thought it gave me the ability to perceive things that other people couldn't; that I was in a place above the average person that didn't have this ability ... a way to satisfy a need to feel good about myself.

His goal was a "codependency thing," to help this petite, young, vulnerable woman, ten years his junior, to overcome her addiction to heroin by gradually weaning her off the drug, rather than substituting methadone to move her from her dependency. He made a contact for heroin and found out how easy it was to sell the first ounce, and before she was detoxed, he was buying and selling another ounce, escalating a process that was a boon to his ego:

And it was fitting in with the lifestyle as I did my socializing in the Mexican neighborhood, drank in a lot of my favorite bars, kind of was accepted in that portion of the Mexican community. . . . But again, it came to pass that I was really getting off, for lack of a better term, in being a dealer, a drug dealer. In my warped way of thinking it was closest thing that I'd ever get to respect. People were almost adoring me. I wasn't getting rich, but I was being enriched by people treating me in a way I felt I always should have been enriched. . . . It was really a feeling of power. . . . When I stopped, I ended up going back into it. Maybe money was an excuse, it was just that I was really enjoying the position I had gotten for myself.

The position of respect lasted for almost seven years. Although he didn't use heroin to begin with, he substituted heroin for cocaine, and, in a while, didn't want to go out and sell and started losing his clients. His heroin addiction got him further into trouble, his wife was leaving for weeks at a time to feed her own addiction, and he was pretending he was caring for his pre-adolescent children and keeping up the image of a working man. He eventually ended up in jail, arguing that he belonged in the hospital when he experienced withdrawal:

It was the middle of July and I was walking along with an old blanket around myself. The only thing I could eat com-

fortably, that made me feel good, was an orange. So there was an Afro-American guy that I'd trade with. I'd give him my dessert, my cake, and he'd give me his orange.

This jail withdrawal took place in the early 1980s and closed a period of dealing that started in 1975. The low point for him was not heroin addiction, but the potential loss of his job. Throughout this period, he continued shiftwork for A. O. Smith, a company that made automotive frames for trucks and sporting vehicles. (The company was sold in January 1997 to Tower Automotive in Minneapolis under pressure from automakers to cut costs by purchasing larger "chunks" of vehicles manufactured by one supplier.)

The way business was at old AO, I'd be laid off, and of course I could really get into my use of drugs. There wasn't work to interfere and I didn't have any appearances I had to make before anybody. I always held the importance of working and holding a job, number one, 'cause I know without that I would be a skid row bum. I would be that wino that people always think of an alcoholic being, rather than the alcoholic that I was; that had that phony front of being a worker, and being a homeowner, and having my life in order. So I knew without the job that I would be there. It was important for me, important for my family.

BILL: RECOGNIZING "PROBLEM PEOPLE" AND FEELING LIKE "I BELONGED"

With all the drinking I've done, I mean the years pass so quick, you'd never even know the year is gone. It's just existence. I didn't really keep track of time, because I had nobody. I've gone all over, mainly by myself, but I felt like going someplace. . . . I have relatives, but I never see them ... none of my relatives are close to me. I go wherever I feel like going. I have no, you know, sense of belonging. I've met so many people, I have some memories of some people I've met, and then some are just forgotten. They were unimportant people, nothing significant in my life.

Bill traces his addiction to alcohol back to an early work environment at age twenty-one or twenty-two, and excuses his earlier experiences with alcohol in the Air Force as "fun."

Finding a place of belonging is relevant here. The military experience included training as a military policeman and six months in the stockade for breaking into the base bowling alley and stealing two cases of beer in preparation for a birthday bash he never had. He spent time in a military rehabilitation center in Texas with heavy-drinking, demoted sergeants as mentors. He recognized these men as "problem people" and at the same time, felt like he "belonged" to this group of "old veterans" who "honored" him and other young recruits by letting them sit and drink in their company. He continued drinking while being assigned duties as a staff car driver. A bad conduct discharge soon followed.

Bill gives us a closer look at the experiences of an Indian man living off the streets of Milwaukee in the 1970s and 1980s. These experiences do not seem to differ significantly from Spradley's ethnography of alcoholic men.⁵ Spradley's description of the "urban nomads" he studied in the drunk tanks and streets of Seattle in the late sixties are characterized by "mobility, alienation, poverty, and a unique set of survival strategies."⁶ Bill can talk about poverty, traveling and hitchhiking, conning, junking, being a trustee in lockup, how drinking "makes the years pass so that you can't tell when one has ended or another year has begun." He has stayed with his sister who graduated from Haskell in Lawrence, Kansas and in Milwaukee with his dad who became an Alcoholics Anonymous counselor and, now nearing seventy, "pushes change" at the tribal casino in Green Bay, and his "detox wedding" to Charlotte, his non-Indian drinking partner of twenty-three years. He can talk about the decline of his health as he turned to a diet of straight liquor, the blood in his stools, the pain in his gut. Despite his attempt to separate himself from "the rest of the drunks and the homeless" through his ability to work, when he saw himself as one of them, his vulnerability to the death the doctors predicted finally became real. He decided that he wanted to live instead. So he stopped drinking.

Currently, Bill works in an Indian agency in Milwaukee, but his connectedness to the community is not clear. His peers are Indian people but his only interaction with them is at work. He spends much of his time alone or with Charlotte. His real focus is money, not relationship. His goal is to work as much overtime as he can to build up his paycheck, but he spends money as fast as he makes it. His connection to his tribe has been tenuous, and he has seen this, primarily, as insurance

against being abandoned in his old age. Lately, he's been thinking about his Oneida relatives. He attended a funeral recently, received a warm reception, and his aunt asked him why he never came up to see them. He pauses to think seriously about that, and then adds, "maybe I should."

FRED: "JUST FITTING IN"

Earlier in his life, playing pool in the bar was not only Fred's economic lifeline, but "the highlight" of his life. He thinks he was looking for friendship, but qualifies this: "You have people who talk to you and people are like your friends. . . . I was just fitting in maybe, fitting in because I never really had nothing. I didn't have nothing." Part of his decision to quit drinking centered on the amount of money he spent for a weekend of drinking. He was tired of not having anything. His friends had jobs, had money. When he was younger, he'd see them taking their kids to the circus, and they'd go to nice clubs. He was rationing his income, money for gas and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Fred's awareness of the changes he was experiencing was the nexus of several events. Charles, a black man, had a bar that Fred and his wife had frequented for years. Charles took an interest in Fred, and the two would fish together and spend time at Charles' cabin. When Charles died, the bar closed, and everybody "spread out and found different bars."

You feel uncomfortable because you don't know what's going on there [in unfamiliar bars]. After you have been at the same bar for like ten years, you knew everybody. Then all of a sudden my kids are getting older. I am starting to spend like 200 some dollars a day in the bar, drinking on the weekends, and that's a lot of goddamn money!

His wife had quit drinking a couple of years before. Now they would argue about old patterns; he was never home and was always at the bar drinking. On Sunday mornings, after drinking since Friday, he found himself waking early with anxiety, shaky legs, and a shaky heart, "feeling like he was going to pass out." So after coming home at three or four in the morning, he would be back in the bar at six a.m. to ease his body into a gentle buzz. Sometimes he'd stay until noon and then wouldn't want to leave because other people were just coming in and the partying would start again. "Then the next thing you know

my son started saying, 'Well, can I stay up here with you, and then I would let him stay up there, play pool, play games, and stuff.'

By this time, Fred was carrying bottles of Ruppemint around with him at work. And it would get worse. In his promise to quit drinking, he started drinking vodka, something his wife could not smell on his breath. He started with a shot of vodka and a soda, moved to small beer glasses of vodka, and exchanged the Ruppemint for bottles of vodka carried under his car seat. He was drinking vodka out of the bottle before he entered the bar to save money and to get "half way buzzed" and "was craving the shit" for a year. Soon, the vodka had no effect and he could feel the full impact of the arguments with his wife about his drinking.

An one time I was kind of buzzed up, just sitting there, and these nice young-looking kids ... came in looking for their mother. And their mother is all drunk with this other guy. ... "Can you come home?" The girl was about fourteen, asking her mother to come home 'cause her kid needs milk and he ain't eat yet, and here, her mother's sitting in the bar all drunk, hanging on this other guy and she ain't got no money. I went outside and the girl is sitting there crying ... and she had this little rug rat sitting with her. So, I felt sorry for her ... and gave her five dollars.

Fred crossed the street to another bar and later returned. He lambasted the woman, "You are up and sad. Your kids are out here starving and they are crying and they want you to come home and you're sitting in a bar." When the man she was "hanging on" finally passed out, the woman approached Fred, "hugging on me and stuff." "You would make a good father 'cause you take care of kids and everything," she told him. "Hey, get away from me, man!" Fred responded. But what happened that afternoon opened his awareness to his own behavior as a father.

And that was the first time it really started to dawn on me. . . . Then my kids would call, "When are you coming home?" I see them kids coming in looking for their parents all the time. I seemed like I was changing. "I ain't going nowhere. Here's a couple of dollars. Get the hell out of here!" And then I was taking my kid to the bar and he was really starting to like to be in the bar. Like when I would go

to the bar on Saturdays, he would be up before me—boom! and ready to go.

Then I started to think about it. I said, look at my life, spending all my money in the bar. Now, my son is going to be in the bar, and he is going to have his life being in the bar, not worrying about nobody else. I don't want my kids to have a life like I grew up—hard, sitting in a bar, wasting your life.

The familiarity of the bar offered new but temporary acquaintances and, occasionally, a good friend, but it is pool that remains Fred's solace. If his mother or somebody died, he says, he'd go to a bar where no one knew him and play pool.

One person is leaving, but other people are coming into your life that you met as friends. . . . I'm not just losing somebody, I'm gaining, too. . . . I've always been that kind of person to keep striving, not to let nothing hold you back. If something happens, it happens. You're just going to pick up and keep on going . . . keeping it moving.

Now, Fred plays pool in a league twice a week for relaxation, as his "time-out." The solitary pool player is inviting trouble in settings where people now carry concealed firearms into bars. Another thing that has changed, observes Fred, is that there are more nondrinkers in leagues than ever before.

When he was a kid, pool was one of his financial lifelines. His skill improved in his young adulthood, and pool served as a reflection of his self-worth. Since he has quit drinking, and as he moves into middle adulthood, the pool lifeline theme resurfaces:

Maybe I was kind of scared that if something really happened that I couldn't work. . . . I'd have to turn to something else to get money. I would get maybe unemployment or social security or something, but that ain't gonna do jack nothing. Maybe I'm scared to lose that talent of playing pool.... I don't want to lose that thing that I know is always there.

Perhaps Fred has come full circle, recognizing that all he really has is himself and what he knows. He has always wanted to own a bar, but the concept of the neighborhood bar has changed in his mind. He and his Indian wife talk about the

Indian community frequently. Fred wants to share what he has in the one way he knows how. He and his wife have talked about buying a bar and creating a community center/bar for families where adolescents can play video games and adults can play pool. Adolescents would have teen nights where they can enjoy an alcohol-and drug-free night of dancing and meeting one another. Would alcohol be served? Probably, but no one would be allowed to get drunk.

GUS: "I DID IT THE INDIAN WAY"

While Gus was in college, his four-year marriage was rocky, the drinking was heavy, the values were polar; she whipped him with her words and he hit her back. He slapped her daughters when they didn't obey him, and they told him to go to hell. They saw counselors, they went to AA, they had another child, a little girl. He even tried to "capture lost glories" by rekindling the band, but the "whole thing did not come out right." Gus dropped out of college for a year to try to take care of it. Eventually he was living off the couch of a friend, drinking a twelve-pack a day "easily," smoking more pot, doing a little coke:

At this time, I got pulled over for drunk driving, lost my license, and I had to take my kids, go pick them up, on the bus; through cold, through rain, through blazing hot, and I was paying the price. And I got my license back. . . . Then, I did the same exact thing over again. I lost my license for drunk driving again. I had just gotten it back, maybe, two months. And I remember the date, April 15, 9:20 p.m. on this freeway right over here heading north, right by the [Milwaukee Brewer's] stadium exit.

Gus argued with himself for twenty-four hours. Images of his own childhood replayed in his mind. He didn't want his kids to "go through the same crap he did." He didn't want his wife to talk to his kids the way she described her "ex." That was it, the first step in his decision process. "I would drink no more, still smoke, but I would drink no more." Later, he gathered the strands of the "internal argument" into a song called "Traveling Thunder."

The court ordered an alcohol assessment for his third Drinking While Intoxicated (DWI) charge in four years. The

counselor at the DePaul Treatment Center told him he was alcoholic. "No shit," he replied. He was required to take Antabuse, and he refused "a drug to take him off drugs." He decided he'd do this the "Indian way" and headed for the Indian Health Board.

Part of the political thing ... was meeting different people that had been through the alcohol, people who were more spiritually attuned. . . . I never really thought about spirituality as a form of coming away from drinking or talking about it. . . . I made the physical, the mental and spiritual decision to go back to where I had come from, back ... with the people. . . . I did it all because I did it here.

For three months, Gus and the Indian female counselor met weekly. They would "smudge" before each session with sweetgrass. Gus would explore his reality while carrying a stone in his hand. "We were learning . . . listening and talking, speaking freely, not judged." It was the nonjudgmental approach that attracted him. He feels there is a stigma in non-Indian treatment programs, "having someone tell you something you already know." His activity turned to volunteer work in the Indian community. This was step two of his healing process:

I had to make myself useful. This is what I needed to do. I needed to work in the Indian community. So many in our community have the same problem, so you weren't judged by whether or not you are an alcoholic, because it's a fact of life. You were judged by who you were, what you did, you were accepted, you know? . . . And that was very spiritual. . . . We all make mistakes, but you are still one of us. You belong to these people.

He refers to Bill Murray in the last scene of the movie *Scrooge*. Bill is saying that you have to want the feeling of being useful, of doing something in the same way you want a drug. That made sense to Gus. He went back to school in 1988, starting slowly, and continued working until graduation in 1992. In the last six months of school, an Indian woman professor in English encouraged him to submit articles for an upcoming Indian writers' conference. He won a writing award at the conference. This was the third step, a confirmation of his skill.

Gus defines spirituality as " the sense of belonging, a sense of knowing where you come from, where you belong. To me,

being in this place [teaching] is spiritual, 'cause I belong here. I am connected here. I am more connected with kids than I am with adults." He knows that he is more at the level of the kids he teaches, but doesn't get wrapped up in things which he cannot control. Gus understands that there are different ways kids learn and wants flexibility in dealing with students' education and discipline. Suspension, for example, is useless as a tool of discipline because it only serves to isolate a youth from the community, instead of supporting him and telling the youth he is cared for, which is something the youth needs to know.

CONCLUSION

The men are at different places developmentally. Mike, the oldest, is actively looking for ways to serve the Indian community, but is not confident of his leadership abilities for fear of making mistakes. He wants to be heard, but wonders if he has anything useful to say sometimes. Mike struggles with the animosity in the relationship with his wife and his daughters. And while he admits guilt and accepts responsibility for the chaos his daughters have shared because of the addictions of their parents, he's making himself available to them now and responding to their needs while helping them financially when he can.

Bill is self-focused, but thinking about his relatives "up north." He counts his money and spends it. He thinks about self-improvement, and it appears there is no action. Then one is reminded that five years ago, Bill was on the streets and drinking every day.

The written transcripts for Fred in the last two interviews reveal a man thinking his way through his relationships with his children, with his daily life, the Indian part of him, and his future without much room for probing questions. At one point, Fred scans the bookshelves in my office and asks, "What is an Indian?" The question is returned, "Fred, what does 'Indian' mean to you?" "I don't know," he answers, "I just figured that if you've read this many books, you would know."

Of the four men, Gus demonstrates the integration of the spiritual, his work, his relationships. The integration is not uninterrupted by life's impediments: illnesses, work upheaval, uncertainties. Still, he is connected through his teaching and work with students. He is connected through his writing and

in his involvement in his community. He is connected through his relationship with his children and his partner. And he is connected through his knowledge of who he is. Gus quotes a line from a war movie spoken by a black soldier, "I don't care for a lot, but what I do care for, I care for a lot." His spirituality is expressed in the time he gives his partner, in telling the kids at school that they are doing good work, listening to those who need to be listened to, and "watching a bird once in a while."

The "world titled for him"—he quotes Vizenor—when he learned to laugh at himself and his own stupidity, the owning of himself, recognizing that denial is, perhaps, "the privilege of men." He still has an addictive personality, he admits. He doesn't drink or smoke anymore, but he plays Star Wars on his computer. It's one way of handling stress. "Absolutely," Gus says with a smile, "I can still blast the hell out of the Empire!"

NOTES

1. Gerald Vizenor, *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo and Other Reports* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

2. *Ibid.*, viii.

3. B. A. Christenson, N. J. Kanaskie, D. J. Landry, and D. P. Slesinger, *American Indians in Wisconsin*, 1980, Populations Series 80-4, Dept. of Rural Sociology (Madison: Applied Population Laboratory, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985).

4. M.A.U.D. Neighborhood Data Center, *1990 Sample Census* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Associates in Urban Development, 1994).

5. J. P. Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970).

6. *Ibid.*, 253.