
Elizabeth Woody Poetry Packet

SHE-WHO-WATCHES, THE NAMES ARE A PRAYER

For David Sohappy, April 25, 1925–May 7, 1991

*My humanness is an embellished tongue,
the bell, a yellow mouth of September's
moon beats outward. She speaks for all
the names that clang in memorial.*

There is Celilo,
dispossessed, the village of neglect
and bad structure.

The falls are faint rocks enrippled
in the placid lake of back waters.

With a sad, stone grief and wisdom
I overlook the railroad.

The tight bands rail along
the whirls of the Columbia.

Drowning is a sensation
fishermen and their wives know of.

Men who fished son after father.

There are drownings in The Dalles,
hanging in jails and off-reservation suicide-towns.

A strange land awaits
the fishermen,
as it had for the Nez Perce, the Navajo, the Cheyenne,
those who wailed in the Long Walks,
keened open the graves of their families.

The dead children.

My children,
with names handed down and unused.

Elizabeth Woody Poetry Packet *(Continued)*

Nee Mee Poo, Diné, Tsistsistas.

The people, pure in emergence.

The immense mother is crying.

“Human beings,”

the words are tremors in the rib cage

of hills.

The consumption of loneliness binds us.

Children lie on the railroad tracks

to die from the wail of night and spirits.

I watch for the rushing head of chaos

and flat hands grope from the cattle cars,

clamor in the swift, fresh air.

A sky is clicking through the regular slats.

The tail whips the dusty battles of the Indian Wars,

unsettling itself, nude and raw.

Celilo Falls sank unwillingly in the new trading

and everyone dissolved in the fall.

Name:

Date:

Elizabeth Woody Poetry Packet *(Continued)*

WE REMEMBER OUR RELATIVES

We begin with flowers beaded onto the cradleboard.

The mattress and forms hold the child's head center and upright:

The legs and spine will be straight.

The laces spiral over the center: They will shape the child.

The baby emerges from the womb and is safely enclosed again.

Leaning on a tree or hanging from a saddle,

the child is connected to us and watches as we gather

huckleberries, catch and clean salmon, dry the roots.

This beginning with protection is brilliant

with attention to detail: cradleboards have a song.

Shells tinkle on the rounded rose bough

that guards the child's face as we walk.

Contoured flowers edging the carriage in arms,

made by relatives especially for the child

to ensure the soul will bloom.

Elizabeth Woody Poetry Packet *(Continued)*

WEAVING

For Margaret Jim-Pennah and Gladys McDonald

Weaving baskets you twine the strands into four parts.
Then, another four. The four directions many times.
Pairs of fibers spiral around smaller and smaller sets of threads.
Then, one each time. Spirals hold all this design
airtight and pure. This is our house, over and over.
Our little sisters, Khoush, Sowitk, Piaxi, Wakamu,
the roots will rest inside.
We will be together in this basket.
We will be together in this life.

IN MEMORY OF CROSSING THE COLUMBIA

For Charlotte Edwards Pitt and Charlotte Agnes Pitt

My board and blanket were Navajo,
but my bed is inside the river.
In the beads of remembrance,
I am her body in my father's hands.
She gave me her eyes
and the warmth of basalt.
The vertebrae of her back,
my breastplate, the sturdy
belly of the mountainside.
"Pahtu," he whispered in her language.
She is the mountain of change.
She is the mountain of women
who have lain as volcanoes
before men.

Elizabeth Woody Poetry Packet *(Continued)*

Red, as the woman much loved,
she twisted like silvery Chinook
beyond his reach.

Dancing the Woman-Salmon dance,
There is not much time to waste.

HAND INTO STONE

Someday the land will be our eyes and skin again.

—My grandmother, Elizabeth Pitt, at seventy-five

Her creped fingers,
teeth marked with red speckles,
held mine tight
as she showed our finger moons to me.
They grew together as snowy stones
scratching themselves sleepily.

She had long fingers
with the mobility of spiders.

I felt them at night
as they climbed my skin.

She wrapped us
in tight shells
with agate crystals.

We breathed in our own breath
under this cover.