

## Forging Spirit

asohtewak – Hearts walking together

The prairie vetch, pastured grass  
buffalo berry shrub, thorn bushes  
reach their hands, their arms  
cling to pant legs as we walk by.  
I smudge each morning to thank Creation  
for this gift  
I've lifted off her breast.  
The Grasslands  
searing sun forces me  
to sip water carried  
in my backpack.

Tomorrow is my daughter's fortieth birthday,  
the womb's birth water that gushed  
is the treaty I signed at her birth.  
Her flame, a soothing glow,  
reflects off her face.

Staggered walkers crawl  
under the burning heat.  
Sign posts mark the way through gravel and sand.  
We climb gullies, lean into the hill's curve  
pause to examine bleached bones.  
I am not alone.  
The silent footsteps of my ancestors  
walk beside me, behind me, around me, with me.

We gather around a horse's skeleton  
use its bones as musical instruments  
sway and sing the Horse with No Name.  
In ceremony my people follow the horse's path,  
receive its medicines it leaves on its trail.

We pitch our tents at Cypress Lake.  
In a dream I am wearing a ribbon dress  
greeted by four groups  
of women singing and drumming.  
They invite a friend and I  
to wade into the water  
as they follow with their blessings.

In the deep valley  
are my grandmothers, grandfathers  
large boulders layered on top of one another.  
Before we descend, we offer tobacco  
to these ancient bones that witness our walk.  
Like children we climb, examine the etched bowls  
sit in a circle and share our thoughts.

We sang as we left an old gravesite offered prayers as  
we passed Old Wives Lake. Not far from here  
the grandmothers gave their lives to save their tribe.  
We stepped on the rock's footsteps,  
cooled our feet in the Frenchman's River,  
watched an eagle feed  
on the remains of a cow's carcass that had fallen  
from its cliff.

Walking with our hearts, e pimohteyank  
legs dirt smeared, feet  
blistered feet, we feed body and soul.  
The wind breathes  
caresses our sun-parched faces.

We are eighty years and younger  
friends from all walks of life.  
Sharing the journey.

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