

Sherman Alexie

Sonnet, with Honor

for Deb Abrahamson

1. On the Spokane Indian Reservation, there is a lovely little stream of water called Blue Creek. I used to swim in that creek. Every Spokane Indian swam in that creek. 2. That creek sits below the uranium mine, now closed, but still unclean, unclean, unclean. 3. For years, Dawn Mining has refused to take care of their radioactive mess. 4. The U.S. Government's only advice: Don't eat the game that lives in the vicinity of the mine. 5. As if there was one kind of deer that gravitated toward abandoned uranium mines and another kind that stayed away from radioactivity. 6. How many years did I swim in that creek? Eighteen. 7. Eighteen years of radioactivity. 8. I will die of cancer. That is my destiny. It is the destiny of most every Spokane on the reservation. 9. O, when we think of Indian warriors, we always think of men in war paint. But we should really think of Indian women in blue jeans. 10. Not warriors with rifles or arrows, but warriors with patience and discipline. 11. I think of Deb Abrahamson in her Pendleton jacket hanging down past her knees. I think of her scaring the shit out of white men in ill-fitting suits. I think of her fighting for her tribe. 12. There is no cure for cancer; uranium has a half-life of 4.4 billion years. But Deb Abrahamson's love for her tribe and her love of the earth and her love of all that is holy and good has an eternal half-life. 13. We cannot defeat cancer but we can defeat hate. We cannot defeat money but we can defeat inertia. We cannot defeat radioactivity but we can defeat cold hearts. 14. Did you know that hawks sing honor songs for the sky? Did you know that deer sing honor songs for the earth? Did you know that salmon sing honor songs for water? Listen. Listen. If you listen closely then you will hear the hawk, deer, and salmon sing honor songs for Deb Abrahamson. And I sing with them. I sing a thousand honor songs for her. I honor her. I honor her. I honor her. I honor her.

Sherman Alexie's sonnet was read by Margot Hill, Spokane Tribal member and attorney, to 120 Tribal members and white people gathered at the Patsy Clark Mansion in Spokane on February 18, 2012 to honor Deb Abrahamson, director of SHAWL Society and Mary Verner, City Councilwoman and Spokane Mayor, 2004-2011 as Watershed Heroes by the Upper Columbia River Group – Sierra Club.